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A CASE STUDY OF INCLUSION AND  
DIVERSITY:  
A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH  
USING THE  
SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

Charmaine Agius Ferrante

PhD

2012

A CASE STUDY OF INCLUSION AND  
DIVERSITY:  
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USING THE  
SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

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of the requirements of the  
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## **Abstract**

### **A Case Study of Inclusion And Diversity: A Whole School Approach Using The Social Model of Disability And Beyond**

This thesis evaluates the experiences of a Maltese school that decided to embrace the philosophy of inclusion. It provides a synthesis of knowledge about the processes of inclusive education, derived from the experience of the main stakeholders in the school. The main research question being: “What changes does the implementation of the Social Model of Disability that focuses on abilities and skills rather than labelling and deficit have on a school population?” Specifically, the study investigated:

- The practices within the school that enable inclusion.
- The experience of students, students’ parents, teachers, learning support assistants (LSAs) and administrators.
- Whether or not, and if so, how disabled students are participating, active members of the school.
- The effect of inclusion on the school community/culture.

A case study approach is used in order to evaluate this school’s process of inclusion and its ramifications on stakeholders. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, along with a triangulation of questionnaires, focus groups, semi-structure interviews and observations. A thematic analysis supported by descriptive statistics was used within an interpretative approach of hermeneutic phenomenology. This research contributes theory to the following three areas in:

1. Offering a different model for an inclusive school.
2. The use of innovative structures in school management.
3. The changes brought about by valuing the education of disabled students.



The findings show a general positive attitude towards inclusive education and suggest that inclusive education heightens the awareness of each interrelated aspect of the school as a community, challenges stereotypes, and promotes contextually relevant research. The work concludes with a series of possible future directions for research and a critical reflection that is needed to help educators achieve progress towards philosophical and practical ideals of a socially and academically just education.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

SN	Special Needs
PSD	Personal and Social Development
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
IEP	Individual Education Programme
MAPs	McGill Action Planning System
MEEF	Ministry for Education, Employment and Family
NMC	National Minimum Curriculum
NGO	Non- Governmental Organisation
PGCE	Post-Graduate Certificate in Education
SWIEN	Student With Individual Educational Needs
SEC	Secondary Education Certificate
DES	Directorate for Educational Services
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
UoM	University of Malta
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
MATSEC	Matriculation and Secondary Certificate
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
MUT	Malta Union of Teachers

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Due to confidentiality issues I cannot name the individuals and school with whom I shared the journey, still continuing along the inclusion route, within which the research took place. Just to say that your dedication, enthusiasm, and willingness to go the extra mile towards improving the educational experience of all the students within the school sets a shining example of what can be.

I would also like to thank three of my peers and friends, one being a parent of a child with Down Syndrome and professional educator and the other two being professionals in the field, one working at the school and the other was a critical friend, for reviewing all my drafts and providing me we invaluable feedback.

## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. The work was done in collaboration with the University of Northumbria.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee in January 2008.

Name: Charmaine Agius Ferrante

Signature:

Date:

**Dedicated with greatest respect to the school**

—

together we became a community of learners

## **Chapter 1**

### **A School for All**

#### **Response and Reflection on Inclusive Theory and Practice**

Inclusive education is an unabashed announcement, a public and political declaration and celebration of difference... [However,] it would appear that the development of education systems has been predicated by the denial of the existence of difference... Turning this around it is not a project for osmosis. It requires continual proactive responsiveness to foster an inclusive educational culture. (*Corbett & Slee, 2000, p. 134*)

This introductory chapter outlines the rationale for this case study research on a traditional boys' mixed ability school in Malta. This school has been striving towards developing inclusive practices in response to learner diversity, moving from mainstreaming to integration, and now to a process of inclusion. This process has come about *on the job*. This is a unique experience and, whilst recognising that there is no inclusion utopia, the school strives to be inclusive-oriented. Efforts in responding to student diversity have included class analysis and the creation of teacher class/subject learning support assistant teams, where collaborative teamwork is fostered and targeted for both within the class teams and across the year groups.

Throughout this research the term "disabled students" is employed instead of "students with disabilities". This is in recognition of the understanding of disability as a form of social oppression rather than as belonging to the student. The disabled students included in this school are students who are statemented and labelled as having autism, attention deficit disorder, Down syndrome, and global developmental delay. In this school many of the disabled students were found to have other diagnosed labels relating to physical and sensory impairment and medical conditions. Labels and diagnoses are applied to individuals based on social and cultural constructions of norms and difference, and are open to change (Bogdan & Taylor, 1992; Thomas, 2004).

Fundamental to the thinking about the provision and the experience of including disabled students in mainstream schools is the choice of educational structures, systems, resources and the financing and evaluation of such systems, structures and resources. Locally, the constraints placed on the advancement of inclusive education by the system, the structural rigidity, the country's social attitudes, and politics are having their impact on the quality of the inclusive school experience. Disabled students need to be provided with the necessary supports, educational resources and opportunities in order not to be discriminated against in inclusive school

environments because of their impairments. The choice of curriculum content, pedagogical practices and the school environment are critical factors as to whether or not disabled students are being actively included or actively excluded. The examination culture within our academically orientated curriculum, which in its turn classifies students as winners or losers, has implications both for levels of achievement on and successful participation of all students in one way or another, but more especially on a disabled student's learning and sense of well-being. On the other hand, pedagogical practices involving cooperation and mutual support promote full participation, in contrast with practices that promote competition and practice putting "children against all children in a battle for success" (McDermott, 1993, p. 293).

With reference to the documents published by the Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family (MEEF) regarding the National Curriculum Framework, Minister Dolores Cristina said in a statement that, "a primary goal of this Government is that all children will exit compulsory education with acquired skills and qualifications and that schools become attractive learning environments" (National Curriculum Framework (NCF), Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2010).

Whilst this is a positive and direct policy statement that should be at the heart of the framework, I have my reservations, because being committed to an inclusive education policy, wherein truly all students learn together, and by being together they become responsible and empowered adult citizens. As Barton claimed in an interview (as cited in Clough and Corbett, 2002), "inclusion is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end, and that end is creating an inclusive society" (p. 16).

I believe that children learn mostly from each other and little can be gained by segregation or specialisation, especially at the ages of acquiring generic skills in primary and through most of secondary education. In an environment where life-long learning is becoming a goal, the notion of 'compulsory education' has to be linked to a determined drive towards the



achievement of skills and qualifications by all, and the post secondary period should not be one of compensating for skills not learnt at primary or secondary level due to the failure of the system. Although successful inclusion is based on the willingness of the community to adapt itself to accommodate disabled students, it is also essential for the individual to have the ability, with the appropriate education and training, to adapt to community expectations (Hardman, Drew & Egan, 2010).

Philosophically I am of the view that the NCF document is positive. It is good that there the pros and cons of most of the policies that the framework would like to adopt are spelt out. However, I have the following concerns. I feel that the framework is not altogether inclusive – it seems that we are not committed to inclusive education. It is rather vague in this aspect and does not really lay commitment to entitlement. The National Curriculum Framework comes after the 1999 National Minimum Curriculum (from now on referred to as the NMC); there is insufficient documentation assessing the level of implementation of the NMC, no appraisal of its success or failure, and thus this Framework apparently starts with no relation to past efforts.

To avoid future vacuums of policy continuity, there should be a clear commitment to the revision process of this new NCF. It could have set dates and measurable goals of achievement, possibly based on the strategies and results studied in the research; these will be extensively presented in the chapters dealing with the research methods, the results and the discussion.

Locally, there is still no consensus on what ‘inclusive education’ means. Recent discussions that might lead to a working definition of what Inclusive education is still require in depth consideration. This is presented in the literature review section and will not be dealt with at this stage. An entire chapter is therefore dedicated to the discussion to extract the meaning of ‘inclusive education’, come up with a working definition and present strategies of how it can be put into practice.

## **Working Experience**

Around ten years ago I had the opportunity to be recruited as an inclusion coordinator in a number of schools. After reading the mission statements and the ethos of a number of schools, I opted on a church boys' school as I felt that this was the school, whose mission statement and ethos were closest to the inclusive experience that I envisaged for all children to experience. The school also accepted that I would be the coordinator involved in, the education of all the children and not only of disabled students.

When I started work at the school, a ballot system was used for mainstream school entry; this meant that the profile of the classroom was reflective of the whole population. Disabled students were then given priority and concessions for entry on humanitarian grounds. A maximum of one to two students with disability per class was the norm. Given the reputation of the school, parents of disabled children really wanted their children to attend this school, and it was part of my duties to ensure that I included as many disabled students as possible in my programme, while keeping the inclusive nature of the school in focus. As such, the school had an average of two Learning Support Assistants (sometimes called "facilitators", but referred to as LSAs from now on) per class at the primary and eventually at the secondary level. My contract at this school was not on a full time basis, and so I was constrained to work limited hours. After the first two years I realised that I would have to go over the process of helping teachers, and especially LSAs, to forge themselves into a team and to understand how to work with one another. Furthermore, at the secondary school level, streamlining LSAs to be in classes according to subject teacher again meant being able to meet subject teachers and LSAs and work with them towards collaboration and the creation of teaching teams.

Through these years of experience, there arose a working model of inclusion. This was due to necessity, but was based on serious study, participation in a myriad of discussions, conferences and seminars, as well

as the application of theoretical notions all carried out in an experience of serendipity.

### **Inclusion or Exclusion?**

The rationale for inclusive education takes on board two considerations. Firstly, it acknowledges the importance of the reasons for inclusive education, making us reconsider the consequences that surround exclusion for both the disabled students and the non-disabled students. Special schools, resource rooms and learning zones are all exclusionary practices, and it is questionable whether these settings give disabled students the opportunities for the full development of the necessary skills needed for life, whilst at the same time they are depriving the non-disabled students of the opportunity to respect and learn about individual differences and tolerance towards others. Secondly, we cannot talk about equity when we are sending disabled students to separate educational settings. Disabled students are being denied their human rights when they are being let down by our education system, and educational failure is also a social injustice. This needs addressing and we need to develop a principled educational system that commits itself to inclusive education through its very practice by offering a just distribution of educational resources and opportunities for disabled students to participate in their learning alongside their non-disabled counterparts.

### **My Inspiration and Position in The Context of The Study**

In the local context LSAs are pegged to students with a statement of needs. In the school I was working in I proposed a difference: teacher-pegged facilitators in the primary school and subject-pegged facilitators in the secondary school. An evaluation of this process yielded positive results (School Development Day 2001). This inspired me to develop the idea to

research the experience of inclusion at the school from the perspective of all stakeholders. Given the complexity of mixed research and also the complexity of inclusive education, it is inevitable that the process of making judgements about quality will not be straightforward. Pawson and Tilley (1997) highlight the importance of taking into account the different perspectives of various stakeholders, who may see the policy or practice differently. They also recognise that understanding actions, such as those in the research, will require an understanding of the social mechanisms at work within the school.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that researchers cannot divorce their research and writing from their past experience, no matter how much they try. It is therefore important for me to share my background and experiences that have in some way influenced this thesis.

I grew up in a large family with a 'difference'; one of my younger sisters is autistic. I did not see anything different about my sister, until the day she first went to school. She did not accompany me or my other sisters, but left home and went to a special school. Being an inquisitive child, but at the same time sensitive to my parents feelings, I tried to ask questions, but was always told that Angela needed a different type of school, and the conversation stopped there. I remember very clearly the first weekend that we were allowed to visit and take Angela out for the day. I accompanied my father to her residential school in South Wales. It was a long car journey, but I was so very excited and looking forward to seeing Angela again that the journey seemed to pass very quickly. It was a much longer journey on the way home. On and off throughout the journey I tried talking to my father about my sister, but he was very good at directing the conversation back to me and my interests! My mother had sent with us a lot of provisions to be given to Angela on our arrival. Angela was a very fussy eater, but loved Smarties; so loaded with a big box of Smarties, I rushed into the building without any other thought except that of seeing my little sister again, and went in with my father at my heels. What met my eyes was difference in a

big way. I was ten years old and was supposed to be a big girl, which was why I was allowed to visit Angela; not one of my other sisters was given that permission. My eldest brother was away at boarding school and my other four siblings are all younger than me. Although my parents did little to prepare me, looking back I do not think anyone could have prepared me for such an experience! The atmosphere was overwhelming; the mixture of ages, most of them were not children but all were behaving like silly children and being spoken to as if they were 5 years old, like indeed Angela was! The women were all wearing bonnets and everyone wore a bib. Whether you were five or forty, playing on swings or with dolls, strings and your own body parts is what struck my eyes. Everyone seemed liked oversized babies to me. There was a cacophony of sounds! I heard laughing, shouting, crying, and, worse still, grunting and snorting. To my father's horror, and probably Angela's, I dropped the Smarties and fled the building as fast as I could, refusing to go back inside. Angela had become disabled.

After being brought face to face with obvious and serious difference en masse, my perspective on any group from the elderly to disabled people that is too great in number is not representative of society and does not speak to us in terms of 'a person' but as a category that society has invented and put into boxes.

I became an infant's teacher and on my first day of teaching I walked into the school with such high hopes of being able to reach all the learners on loan to me for the year. It is a tall order when one reflects upon it. I was young and enthusiastic and working in a socially deprived area in Northern Ireland. I soon recognised that the children and their families were going to teach me as much and perhaps more than I was going to teach them. I had a lot of learning to do. It was the start of my reflective journey of trying to make changes in the field of education for all learners, but especially the challenge of including disabled students in their local schools or in the schools of their parents' choice.

Working in Malta in the field of Early Intervention led me to reading for a

Masters in Educational Studies where I chose all the special education modules and turned them into an inclusive perspective. Being very involved in education and the Disability movement in Malta, I decided to go back into school to the very place I had begun and support administrators, teachers, students and parents in our quest for the right education for all learners.

As a teacher, developmental educationist and lecturer I have always been interested in not what the child learns but in how the child learns and, therefore, in the why the child does not learn. I have always believed every child can learn and that it is the teacher that holds the key, the key being, reflective practice on one's own teaching, the ability to change one's practice to reflect the child's abilities, learning styles, motivation and interests. By carefully designing the curriculum that includes multiple modalities as points of entry, teachers can directly and immediately influence the social and educational outcomes experienced by the children in their classrooms. These are personal reflections and have become a great part of who I am and of my interest in diversity, equality and achievement in education.

This has led me on another journey, reading for my PhD. I chose to evaluate a school in which I have now become a part of its struggle to include a wide range of disabled students alongside their non-disabled peers. This is proving to be a very sobering journey, because I am in a way researching and evaluating my own practice and my own educational journey.

This has both its advantages and its disadvantages. On the one hand, I have inside knowledge and form part of the school's Senior Management Team (referred to as the SMT from now on) as a consultant educator. Access is therefore not a problem, but on the other hand I am reviewing and evaluating practices that I helped to put into place. I have also followed the disabled students, since they started receiving early intervention, and I have followed their educational journey through infancy, into school and some into postsecondary education. Whilst I have had the opportunity to be fully immersed in this research, I have had to ensure that bias was stated and reflected upon. During interviews and focus groups I made sure that these

biases were explained and made clear before the beginning of each session.

The 'why' of choosing a boys' school to carry out this study as opposed to a girl's school or a mixed school requires an explanation. In Malta, separate gender schools are a part of our context. In fact, mixed classes were introduced in the state primary schools only in the early 1980s. Church primary schools have remained single sex schools. Both state secondary and church schools in Malta are singled sexed. There is one independent boys' school and the other Independent schools are co-educational.

The school chosen covers the whole spectrum of compulsory education from Grade One to Form 5, which was an important factor to the study. I wanted to implement change throughout a school where the disabled students could go all the way through their school journey without the threat of a change of system from an inclusive school experience to a segregated setting. I was also looking for a school that was not only open to change but wanted to change. Building a community of learners is essential to any school looking at change. To work towards creating an inclusive community of learners, therefore, needed both a personal and a collective commitment towards inclusive principles, policy and practice.

## **The School**

The school under study is a school that is founded by a Catholic saint who developed insights, principles and organisation for students having emotional and educational needs over three hundred years ago, around 200 years before John Dewey (1916). His philosophy of education was guided largely by his love for the young, by his faith and by his determination. He therefore took action, when a situation called for it, to set up a school and based the educational ethos on these beliefs. He was more concerned with solutions rather than with theories. The elements of the schools' ethos includes a programme that should be integrated, informed and practical, as well as organised to include student involvement and individualized to meet

students' needs. The goal of the school is to passionately follow this legacy that is to give a humane education to the students influenced mainly by the tenets, morals and spirituality of the Christian life. The students, the members of the religious community, the lay teachers, the learning support assistants, the parents, the alumni and those who make up this community of associates are part of the great family of this education system. In this community dedication and enthusiasm are necessary for helping each member of this family, especially the students, to sustain one another and learn in the best environment possible for students between five and sixteen years of age, which are the Maltese compulsory school age ranges.

The director is the principal of the school and the employment authority. All members of staff, including the Junior and Senior Heads of school, are accountable to the director. Whilst he directs the college, the respective heads together with their assistant heads and teaching support consultant take care of the day-to-day running of the school.

The members of the religious community organize seminars for the staff during school hours, where they outline the attitude that the staff are required to take. All teaching and supporting staff are required to attend a one year religious formation course of one meeting a month. This course involves learning about the founder, pedagogy and Christian values. For example, members of the religious community espouse the need to appreciate the dignity and worth of each human being, which is outlined in the vision statement and mission statement below taken from the staff handbook.

### **Vision statement**

“The school will be an exemplary, nationally recognised school, characterised by a highly professional school community empowered to create a vibrant learning environment, which fosters spiritual, academic and interpersonal growth.” (School Staff Manual, Appendix A)



## **The mission statement**

“The mission of the school is to provide a disciplined academic and Christian education in the 300-year old tradition. Our mission is successful, when our students:

- I. Understand and accept themselves and others
- II. Develop their talents in service to society and the church
- III. Think logically and critically and express themselves effectively
- IV. Know clearly what they believe and why they believe
- V. Maintain physical fitness and mental health - avoiding excesses and abuses
- VI. Possess social awareness and a sense of responsibility for the common good
- VII. Are people of deep faith and prayer”

(Appendix A School Staff Manual)

Therefore, the school aims at providing a multi-faceted education, a Christian education, an academic education and an all-round education. The school tries to promote intercurricularity which in turn impacts on the atmosphere of the school. On the island the school is thought of as being a highly progressive school.

To be eligible to teach at the school one must be adequately qualified. The minimum requirement is a Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.) in the area of primary or secondary respectively. Some teachers have obtained their Masters qualification in Primary or Secondary education. This impacts upon and is reflected in the standard of service (teaching) provided. In the case of subject teachers who teach at Grade 6 level or higher, a Bachelor of Arts (BA) and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in their particular subject area is sufficient to be able to teach at the school.

Most LSAs employed at the school have a first degree in psychology (B.Psych. or B.A.) or a first degree in some other helping profession (e.g. occupational therapy). Other assistants employed at the college are qualified LSAs, having obtained a Diploma in Facilitated Education from the University of Malta.

The LSAs are important members of staff because they provide the teacher with much needed practical help in the classroom. The LSA provides an important service to those boys needing extra help and also ensures that the disabled students' entitlements are met. In addition, a personal LSA is provided for a specific student who is entitled to a personal assistant. For example, should a student need physical support to access the curriculum and to negotiate the school, this is provided for on a 1 to 1 basis throughout and around the school day. The school has three quite separate sections: the infant section, the Junior section and the Senior section. The Senior section caters for students in Forms One to Form Five. The Junior section caters for all students in Grades three to six, and the infant section for students in grades one and two. There are three classes per year in the infant and Junior section, and four classes per year in the Senior section. Class population is 26 students per class in the infant and Junior School, and 24 students per class in the Senior School. The school has a population of nine hundred and forty eight students.

Since Malta is a small island community, the school is accessible to all who live in Malta, but not for those who live in Gozo. The physical setting of the school is quite visual and presents a welcoming and positive atmosphere. All the corridors and classes in the primary school are decorated with the students' work as a matter of reinforcement and appreciation. This makes the school system a colourful and a motivating experience for anyone who steps into this college.

Although you just walk up two flights of stairs, the ambience changes in the secondary school. There is little evidence of the students' work and the structure is more traditional. The classes are equipped with the right

furnishings, such as IWBs (Interactive White Boards), which enhances a maximum potential for education as well, because each student's education is the most important element within this school. The way in which the classes are equipped and set, and the way the students are divided into sub groups, are made with the following particular aims:

1. So that the students have the physical and designed environment to become cooperative with each other.
2. To encourage a peer mentoring system, where students help one another.
3. To possibly promote and foster friendships so that students can value one another.

These approaches are up to date with the recent aims for schools as supported by Sapon-Shevin (2007) who maintains that possible aims of schools should be to create classrooms in which all students see themselves reflected and validated by the curriculum, attitudes and classroom practices.

The Senior School offers a variety of subjects, academic, practical and arts, ranging from Art & Crafts and Drama & Music to Technology & Design, Computer Studies and The Sciences. There are various labs and workshops, making it possible to put theory lessons, taught in class, into practice. A wide range of sporting activities are on offer, such as football, basketball, hockey and athletics which are practiced on the school grounds and in the state of the art gym. For students who prefer less hectic sports the school offers table tennis, chess, bowling and pool. There are also a variety of clubs made up of students across the forms where senior students help in the formation of others and share in the responsibilities of doing the 'work' and running the club. The nature of the group enhances collaboration and peer tutoring, and fosters teamwork and responsibility.

The school consists of mixed ability students as entrance is through a ballot system at primary school level, with no selective examinations taking place. The policy is to include all types of learners within the school.

Fundamentally, the Christian schools developed to teach as Jesus did. He, the “master”, was “a rabbi”, and so his apostles and disciples follow his lead. Therefore in essence the schools are open to non-believers and believers of other faiths who are interested in receiving teachings which revolve around the Christian faith. It is then up to them to follow suite and respect the faith upon which the school ethos is based, as they are in turn respected as human beings who attend a church school with the aim of developing themselves in their totality and full potential, and this includes faith, reason and a maturity in spirituality. One cannot expect such a school, based on Christian faith, to train and raise individuals of other faiths in any other faith of their own. That is why in Malta there are schools pertaining to either the different denominations of the Christian faith, notably the Biblical and the Evangelical churches, as well as a school for Muslims.

Since 2001 the college has created the position and appointed a teaching support consultant to provide all students with an equal opportunity to learn and to create the right setting for an inclusive educational experience. The teaching support consultant has followed an open door policy, making herself constantly available to parents and staff. Within the nine years of implementing the policy of inclusion, the college has had one hundred and ten disabled students in the classrooms. Students with all types of disabilities are accepted, and the school strives to practice inclusion using a whole school approach.

The school has class-pegged LSAs in every classroom in the infant and Junior School, and subject-pegged class LSAs as from the last year of primary school through to Form 5. For this reason the school has created teacher/LSA teams, where the teams stay on working together and the class moves on. The college has moved from mainstreaming to integration and now to the process of inclusion. The teacher/LSA teams within the classes are there to be of service to the whole class and not just for the disabled student. This is a unique experience. Whilst recognising that there is no inclusion utopia, the college strives to be inclusive-oriented. Today all

classes have teacher/class LSA teams, and collaborative teamwork is fostered and targeted for. Early identification, referral, assessment and provision policies are in place.

The main aim of this college is to educate all students, including disabled students, in the best possible environment so that students can get a meaningful educational experience. The school aims to think in terms of inclusive education being its underlying philosophy. This is emphasized by aiming to bring together diverse students, their families and educators to work together to create a school experience based on acceptance, belonging and community. The school aims to follow a trans-disciplinary philosophy (Giangreco, 2002; Giangreco, Cloninger and Iverson, 1998; Orkwis and McLane, 1998; Orelove, 1994) where all members of the team commit themselves to teach and work across disciplinary boundaries to provide students with integrated services. McGill Action Planning System (MAPs) and Individual Educational Programme (IEP) meetings are held for all students with a statement of needs, in which all the teachers, facilitators, students, supporting professionals and parents are expected to participate. The IEP is an individual plan listing the extra/differentiated support the individual student is entitled to. Such a programme aims to address academic, social behaviour, communication, physical strengths and other challenges (Salend, 2008). IEPs contain important issues pertaining to how a disabled student can have greater access to the general curriculum. Parents are invited and expected to be in partnership with the teaching teams since the students' presence in the school, and their social, behavioural and academic improvement, are largely due to the parents' efforts and commitment to their children. Therefore it is also obligatory to include parents in the school team, because they are the ones who can determine the best educational experience for their children. The school staff's role depends mostly on the student's family's priorities and resources. Therefore, it is the effort of each individual within the team, and the type of teamwork the school embraces, which make the school experience both remarkable and manageable at the

same time. The way teachers and LSAs plan their teamwork collaboratively is working towards 'co-teaching'.

Co-teaching aims to be the shared responsibility for planning, delivering instruction and evaluation for all students, so that no one is physically removed from the class (Salend, 2008). Inclusion is given credit, because the school is the only place where students are prepared to become contributing members of society by helping such students to foster academic, socio-emotional, behavioural and physical development (Salend, 2008). Through co-teaching one plans to offer a school experience to all students which is mainly person-centred, because the school places every student at the centre by highlighting and accepting his strengths, needs, challenges and entitlements (Tomlinson, 2003).

A school's educational experience is in line with the fundamental principles of inclusion, when all learners are placed together in the same classes with an equal access to the curriculum and are provided with accommodations, adaptations and differentiated instruction where necessary. Classroom management practices induce possibilities for accommodating each individual need. Educators in the inclusive environment are flexible, and are aware of the students' needs (Conderman & Morin, 2004). Through this all students can be individually included in class by simply differentiating the curriculum instruction and the teaching approach. These continuous adjustments in overall classroom practice can be achieved through a reflective practice approach.

This in turn demonstrates that the college promotes acceptance and supports students to achieve personal fulfilment. Effective inclusion demands educators in schools to provide all learners with an equal access by placing them all together in a mainstream community (Roach, Salisbury, & McGregor, 2002).

Peer Preparation Programmes are run across the school at the beginning of every scholastic year. The aim of a Peer Preparation

Programme is to inform students about disability issues and concerns, whilst discussing some of the difficulties a disabled student might face. The disabled student plays an active role in the programme.

Finally, the school policy and decision-making policy aim to be child-centred and not teacher-centred. Through such a child-centred approach, the potential benefits for the child form a focal part of the way decisions are taken. If an option or mode of action benefits a student, then the decision is likely to put into action.

### **Terminology and Language in Inclusive Education**

Language is a powerful tool that can be effective in both the removal of barriers and in the creation of barriers within inclusive education. The language used within the medical model of disability is associated with the exclusion of disabled students (Ainscow, 2000). The terms disabled and non-disabled will be used in line with the social model of disability thinking. The exception to this will be when quoting or discussing work of other authors who may use the terms in other ways.

### **The aim of this research**

This research will attempt to evaluate the experiences of a Maltese school that claims to have embraced the philosophy of inclusive education by adopting a whole school approach towards the inclusion of disabled students. The school contends to be implementing a social model of disability. The main research question addressed was: "What changes does the implementation of the Social Model of Disability have on a school population. Supporting the main question the study will investigate:

- The practices within the school that enables inclusion.
- The experience of students, students' parents, teachers, LSAs, and administrators.
- Whether or not and how disabled students are participating active members of the school.
- The effects of inclusion on the school community/cluture

The study aims to describe both attitudes and practices towards issues, and the implementation of a school effort towards including disabled students in mainstream classrooms within a Maltese educational context. The following research aims evolved during the research as presented in the Discussion:

1. A model of diversity versus a model of inclusion,
2. The presentation of an innovative approach to school management.
3. The possible changes brought about by valuing the education of disabled students.

Therefore the possible outcomes of this research will be a contribution to the body of literature on the subject evaluating the following three areas:

1. Offer a different model as a support system
2. The use of innovative structures in school management
3. The changes brought about by valuing the education of disabled students



In respect of the specific school involved, this study is seen as an opportunity to aid its reflective and reflexive thinking on its own practice in the area of inclusion. It will also be of interest to other schools, while taking into consideration and acknowledging that this is a small-scale study. Therefore, while helping this school move forward in its journey towards better inclusive practices, it might also help other schools in moving towards better inclusive practices. Ainscow (1999) states that in helping schools to become more inclusive it is necessary to use existing practices and knowledge as starting points for development.

## **The Organisation of the Thesis**

The thesis is organised into six chapters. The first chapter states the aims and rationale and my inspiration for the study, and provides background information in which to place and interpret the research.

Chapter Two reviews the literature that informs and supports the aims of this study. Chapter Three includes the research design and explores the methodological theory underpinning the study, including the theoretical perspective and the methodologies. It also outlines the methods and the procedures used including the selection and recruitment of research participants, the ethical principles that were considered, and the data collecting tools that were used. Chapter 4 presents the quantitative findings of the parents', students' and teachers' questionnaires. Chapter Five presents the qualitative findings of the study. Chapter Six discusses the results of the research and critiques these in the context of the literature, as well as in the context of future research required. Finally, this chapter summarises and draws conclusions about the study. It also provides indicators and recommendations for further studies on the inclusive school experience.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter one has provided background information in which to position and interpret this research. It has briefly discussed the development of educational provisions in Malta for disabled students and touched upon the inclusion/exclusion debate. The school being researched was introduced, and the rationale and inspiration for the study was described. Finally, key terms were defined and their use in this research clarified.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Witnessing the Inclusive Experience**

Are we talking about where children are placed and with what level of resource provision? Or, are we talking about the politics of value, about the purpose and content of curriculum, and about the range and conduct of pedagogy? (Slee, 1997, p. 412)

## **Inclusion in a Mainstream School: Attitudes, Practices and Theories**

This chapter presents current observations, attitudes, practices and theories concerning the inclusion of disabled students in a mainstream school. The outcome of this literature review will be an analysis of selected research and theory on the many varied issues of inclusive education in respect to the research question posed earlier. The issues will concern inclusive education and, more pertinently, the inclusion of disabled students, including definitions, philosophical orientations, research typologies, disability models, school improvement, attitudes, beliefs and values, a whole school policy, universal design for learning, inclusive teaching approaches, practices and support. The above issues will be built upon and discussed in relation to the data analysis in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

### **Revealing language, defining inclusion.**

The very language that surrounds and accompanies a definition of 'inclusion' as a place, or something that is 'done' or 'practiced', is usually revealing. Administrators may refer to the 'inclusion class', the 'inclusion team', or speak with enthusiasm about the acceptance of the science department to 'do inclusion'. They may refer to teachers as 'inclusion teachers', the students as 'statemented students', and the staffroom as an 'inclusion staffroom'. When inclusion is viewed as the practice of placing disabled students in general education settings, it is, in many ways, simply a new label applied to disabled students. A student may be given the label of Aspergers when he is just four years old, but how does that label affect him at twelve years of age and further on down the road, when he enters University with his Matriculation in place? In fact, is the question never asked, let alone answered?

Whilst there is evidence in the literature in the field of inclusive education that there is agreement on some definitions and explanations of

inclusion education, it remains a complex and contradictory concept. Definitions of inclusion vary according to the theoretical orientations of writers. It is argued by Lindsay (1997) that this causes problems in terms of both research and policy. Early definitions of inclusive education (Rieser and Mason, 1992) focused on the valuing and acceptance of difference and on the rights of disabled students to attend their local neighbourhood school as valued members of the school community. This definition of inclusive education is still central when defining inclusive education but, through the practice of inclusive education, definitions include a focus on contextual issues related to school practices (Booth, 2002). Skrtic (1991) make us aware that inclusive education does not focus on the student per se, the emphasis actually being on the regular education programme and the organisation. In more recent research the focus has been on the social, cultural and political aspects of inclusion or exclusion of disabled students (Slee 2010).

The perception that most students are normal and some disabled, and therefore need to be helped to become normal, is still a concomitant of today's society that values uniformity rather than diversity. It is not an inclusive school if members of staff are still classifying students into two groups; 'the normal students' and 'you know the other students'. According to Emanuelsson:

Once children are identified as 'different', they become problematic to mainstream schools and teachers. From within the categorical perspective the process of labelling children as 'having difficulties' has the effect of investing the source of any difficulty of problem within the child. Once this process is complete, then it becomes easier to transfer the responsibility to 'specialists' trained to deal with the 'problems' exhibited by the child. (Emanuelsson, 2001, p. 135)

In Sutherland's book *Disabled We Stand* (1981) the author discusses how the disability community can never reach true equality unless the idea of being disabled versus normal is eliminated. He argues:

A more radical approach is needed: we must demolish the false dividing line between 'normal' and 'disabled' and attack the whole concept of physical normality. We have to recognise that disablement is not merely the physical state of a small minority of people. It is the normal condition of humanity. (Sutherland, 1981, p.18).

Although dated, this concept is still valid today. Furthermore, inclusive schools say: "come in, we celebrate difference here. You can be yourself and not struggle to fit in" (Corbett and Slee, 2002, p. 143). It is school administrators', teachers', support staff's and even the peers' responsibility to help disabled students interact with their peers, because placing a disabled student in a mainstream class comes without any guarantee that the student will be able to interact and learn together with his peers. Although in a few schools practices do change, the core understanding of administrators, teachers and learning support assistants about their responsibilities to teach and include disabled students does not change. That is ensuring that the learning needs of disabled students remain primarily with the learning support assistants. Simply the dumping of students in regular classrooms without addressing issues of exclusion, teasing, curriculum modifications, peer support and pedagogical differentiation dooms inclusion to failure (Mara Sapon-Shevin, 2007 int.xv). An inclusive school is one in which the structures change to accommodate all students, rather than the students having to adapt to the structures. This needs to be an important value in inclusive schools, (Aninscow, Howes Farrell and Frankham, 2003).

### **Examining Research Literature Concerning the Experience of Inclusion**

When examining research literature concerning the experience of inclusion and disability in schools, it is important to be aware of the different approaches to that experience (Lim and Tan, 1999) and to locate where Malta stands in the arena of inclusive education. Clarke (2006) states that a predominant approach has placed impairment related concerns at the centre,

which has often led to a focus on biological vulnerability, 'developmental delay', and dependency. This can be considered and outlined in exclusionary discourses such as that of 'personal tragedy' that can reduce expectations and increase feelings of dependency for parents and students, leading to negative attitudes implicated in exclusion as opposed to inclusion. The practice of inclusion is still associated with changing the behaviour of the disabled student and does nothing to address how different impairments define each individual disabled student or the exclusionary behaviour of the peer group. Schools, curriculum, teacher identities are in reality associated with mainstream environments, standards and achievements that are at odds with the quirkiness of disabled learners (Goodley, 2006). Schools continue to exclude disabled students by singling them out for support lessons and in doing so segregating them from their non-disabled peers through the very support systems put in place to address their individual educational needs. These students remain unrepresented in images of schooling and educational attainment (Goodley, 2006). A great deal more needs to be achieved in the realm of school development towards creating a more positive environment in order to welcome disabled students in every class having the teaching team's total commitment towards these students (Booth and Ainscow, 2002).

The issue of what renders a flourishing diverse school community and to what extent are disabled students fully included in their schools is a concern. In an inclusive school setting, it is usual practice that teachers and or LSAs adapt methodology used to teach different subjects in order to include the disabled student. This still amounts to addressing disabled students rather than the culture and whole classroom practices which leave disabled students marginalised (Booth, 2002). Schools need to move beyond the adaptation of curricular practices and the modifications in behaviour management, to constructing a social school climate, where difference is recognised and social exclusion is actively discouraged.

## **Research typologies.**

“Inclusion means welcoming everyone – all students, all citizens – back into our schools and communities” (Stainback & Stainback, 1992, p. 15).

Ainscow (2006) developed a typology of ways of thinking about inclusion. The first typology considers inclusion as a concern with disabled students and others labelled as ‘having special educational needs’ who consider inclusion as asserting their rights within local mainstream education. The second one considers inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions. If inclusion is associated with students labelled as ‘having special educational needs’, then its connection to ‘bad behaviour’ comes a close second (Ainscow, 2006, p.18). The third typology views inclusion, as being around all groups who are more vulnerable to being excluded. Campbell (2002) found that there is an increasing trend for exclusion in education to be viewed more widely in terms as overcoming discrimination and disadvantage in relation to any groups vulnerable to being excluded. A student may be in school but still be experiencing exclusion if he is not able to access the curriculum, friendship and other experiences considered as ordinary (Booth, 1996; Kearney, 2008). Inclusion as the promotion for all emphasizing the importance that everyone should benefit from the school experience is another typology. The old special education model must not be replicated; rather, the goal of an inclusive school is to develop very good general education instruction (McLeskey & Waldron, 2001) which will in turn help all students achieve their personal best.

## **The international commitment to inclusive education: Human Rights.**

Inclusion is one of the most pressing issues within the field of education, both internationally and locally. The international commitment to inclusive education was made explicit in the Salamanca World Statement on



Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). It is a never-ending process which, when all is said and done, is nothing more than good teaching for all students. It is a concept that is based on a positive view of difference, working together, value and respect, and includes teaching disabled students alongside typically developing children within mainstream schools. Inclusive education has been described as a human rights issue (Daniels & Garner, 1999). There is no dispute in the literature that education is a basic human right for all children, and that free and open education systems are necessary for creating inclusive societies. There is certain appeal for a human rights approach to inclusive education (Mittler, 2000). One of the advantages of the human rights stance is that it lessens the importance of, or makes irrelevant, research validation about the benefits of inclusive education (Mittler, 2000). According to Exley (2002) the principles of inclusion are founded on human rights:

- Students are entitled to learn together
- Children should not be discriminated against
- Society benefits from all students learning together
- Inclusion enables all of society to develop without prejudice and intolerance

Regular schools with this orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994).

Inclusive education enhances social interaction and acceptance of differences, thus promoting inclusion in society. Murray (2006) includes a table of words linked to exclusion and inclusion. Words such as 'self worth', 'involved', 'wanted', 'valued', 'confident' and 'alive' are associated with inclusion. Whilst exclusion is linked to words like 'useless', 'hurt', 'inadequate' and 'embarrassed'. Language has been reported as an instrument of exclusion (Ainscow, 2000; Ballard, 2003b; Booth, 2000a; Slee,

2001b). According to Corbett (2001), employing the term 'special needs' is just another barrier towards including disabled students in schools. In fact, Ainscow (2000) reports that when students are categorized as special, this identifies them as different from the other students and different in ways that are not valued by schools.

The concept of inclusion is experienced as a process located within the cultures, policies and practices of a whole school.

Inclusive education speaks to all those involved. It is not an isolated experience. It is an educational pattern that moves from being disabilist to contributing to the development of the individual holistically and comprehensively. These complex educational and social patterns are experienced in schools and their communities (Corbett and Slee 2000, p.43).

The issue of inclusion is becoming increasingly evident within international educational debates around a set of international policies to do with increasing access to and participation in education throughout the world. However, it follows that although it is possible to agree across international boundaries what inclusion means in general terms, "...the reality in each national system will be determined by the history, culture and politics" (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). It is possible that, as a result, progress has been uneven both within and across continents and countries.

## **Inclusion in Europe**

Throughout Europe there is a wide variation of what deems to be inclusive school practice. In fact, on the basis of the level of inclusive practice, Meijer et al. (2003) divide countries according to the following three categories:

- I. The Uni-Directional Approach, where the majority of students are included in the same school providing one educational system with a variety of services focused at school. These countries include Spain,

Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland, Norway and Cyprus.

- II. The Multi-Directional approach is a number of approaches practiced between mainstream and special schools. Countries applying this system are Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxemburg, Austria, Finland, England, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland and Slovenia.
- III. The third category is the Bi-Directional Approach which has two distinct educational systems: one type of school for typically developing children and the other for those with a statement of educational needs. Students attend either a special school or special classes in an ordinary school, where they would not have access to the ordinary curriculum. Switzerland and Belgium adopt this system.

Although in Malta inclusion is seen as being practised with the vast majority of disabled students attending mainstream schools, the practice is not as effective, efficient or inclusive as one would wish. The proof of this is the fact that Malta's practice of inclusive education falls within the Multi-Directional Approach, and disabled students and their families are demanding a chance for a dignified educational experience with real but possible outcomes (Tanti Burlò, 2010). The major challenges for all decision makers and practitioners is how to engage with issues raised by disabled students and their families, and how to find innovative ways to create a more effective and meaningful educational experience of all students.

### **Inclusive Education: the cultural, historical, political and social frameworks.**

Inclusive education can be analysed within a number of varied frameworks: the cultural, the historical, the political and the social (Armstrong, 1999). The culture of a school and its interpretation is at the foundation of understanding the symbols that the school institution is engrossed in (Ritzer, 1996). The culture identifying the atmosphere in a

school plays a central role in understanding the school community. In many ways the history of inclusive education is located and stems from within the field of special education. In fact, reform in special education represents just about all the issues involved in bringing about educational reform (UNESCO, 1994). Historically, the struggle for inclusion has been a reflection of personal and cultural values and has in the main been led by parents of disabled students together with educators as allies. Inclusive schooling incorporates a political dialogue (Corbett and Slee, 2000). Fundamentally, inclusion addresses a search for inducing equality (Slee, 1993) and individual programmes suited to the particular needs of students. Todd (2006) takes a look at the effects of inclusion on the non-disabled population and finds that it is “positively enriching knowledge and understanding”. In fact, Vianello & Lanfranchi (2009) boil down the greater success of individuals with a disability in Italy to successful inclusion in schools and communities. This was later confirmed when Italian results were compared to an American context, where less inclusive placements were available (Scruggs & Michaud, 2009). Studies cited in Giangreco (2009) show that in inclusive settings people with disability improved socially and developmentally (Fisher & Meyer, 2002).

However, Nakken and Pijl (2002) claim that studies on the effects of inclusion are inconclusive. One of the main reasons for this is that teachers have been found to overlook or underestimate the social isolation of disabled students. In fact their study revealed that, on average, disabled pupils have a significantly lower number of friends and are less often members of a cohesive subgroup when compared to their typical peers. In addition, disabled pupils have fewer interactions with classmates, have more interactions with the teacher and are less accepted than non-disabled pupils. Kauffman and Hallahan (2005) argue towards the benefits of continuing special and separate education together with specialised pedagogies due to the impracticability of inclusion, its ideology and the pedagogic and social benefits of special education. These discourses continue to evolve, and again we experience both inclusive and special education as cultural and

political phenomena. Inclusion becomes meaningful when it is embedded in the community and society.

Inclusion and how it impacts on the educational system universally inspired me in my work with disabled students and their families. Slee (2003) and Ballard (2003) remind us that “inclusion is about ourselves”. I wanted to experience the practices that enable inclusion and be a part in this process of change within the educational system in Malta.

Only when we begin to wrestle with the barriers to inclusion lodged in our own attitudes, thinking and practice can we begin to engage with the struggles “out there”. These must never be underestimated. The struggles for inclusion come out of that. (Armstrong & Barton, 1999)

### **Integration versus Inclusion**

“Education is not only a person’s right, but also a catalyst for human development and growth” (SEN, 2003, as cited in Mahbub, 2008, p. 33; Zinkil & Gilbert, 2000). The Disabled People’s Movement, which draws attention to policies and environments discriminating against people with a disability (French & Swain, 2000), is one of the diverse movements and states that ‘our vision is of a world where disabled adults and children can enjoy their full human rights and civil liberties; a world where disabled people can fulfil their life ambitions without discrimination, isolation and institutionalisation.’ (United Kingdom Disabled People Council).

This is leading to disabled students being educated in a general education classroom concurrently with their non-disabled peers. Pertaining to the rights of disabled students, and of equal importance to the disability agenda, are the “1975 passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children (EHA)” (Ware, 1998); the Salamanca Statement (1994) that “Regular schools are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes” (Booth & Ainscow, 1998), the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) and the current and previous *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (Wiebe Berry, 2006; Zinkil & Gilbert, 2000).

All these laws have been influential in changing policies and practices to reduce exclusion and discrimination both in schools and in the community as a whole (Ainscow, 1997). The core foci of integration was linked to special education reform and the reform of the general education system to make it more comprehensive and diverse (Vislie, 1995, p. 47). However, they paid little attention to teaching and learning (Farrell, 2000).

Internationally and nationally, integration and inclusion were perceived to be one and the same. According to Tomlinson (1996), inclusion means more than integration. "It is the notion of extending what most of us can have to marginalised groups" (Tomlinson, 1996 as cited in Florian, 1997, p. 7). In point of fact, it is not very long ago that the term 'inclusion' started being used (Farrell, 2004; Thomas, 1997; Zinkil & Gilbert, 2000). Prior to the 1980s, educators used the term 'integration', referring to the physical placement of students with disability into mainstream schools (Farrell, 2004; French and Swain, 2000; Swain & Cook, 2001; Thomas, 1997; Zinkil & Gilbert, 2000).

At the time when educators were using the word 'integration', students were expected to adapt to the system whilst the system retained its previous structure (Thomas, 1997; Zinkil & Gilbert, 2000).

Inclusion is a broader vision than integration, because it covers more issues (Pijl et al. 1997). Whilst the term 'inclusion', as addressed in the introduction, refers to the complete acceptance of all children in an understanding and celebration of diversity (Farrel, 2004; Martin et al., 1998; Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008; Roach, 1998; Swain & Cook, 2001; Thomas, 1997), where students feel that they belong, actively participate, and mutually support each other (Booth & Ainscow, 1998; Farrell, 2004; Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans & Soulsby, 2007; Rieck & Dugger Wadsworth, 1999). This discourse is in line with the social model of thinking about disability issues based on insider views by disabled and non-disabled students and the definitions; it is this which will be adopted in this research.

... fundamentally challenges the traditional approach which regards impairment and disabled people as marginal, or an 'afterthought', instead of recognising that impairment and disablement are a common experience of humanity, and should be a central issue in the planning and delivery of a human service such as education (Mason and Rieser, 1994, p. 41).

In the practice of inclusion the system adopts particular strategies, such as universal design for learning and cooperative learning, and provides support systems in order to develop the student's potential to its best (Martin et al., Swain & Cook, 2001; Thomas. 1997; Zinkil & Gilbert, 2000). When a setting is truly inclusive, all children regardless of their needs are given a fair chance to learn with their peers and are educated fulltime in the general education program (Idol, 1997, 2006; Mahbub, 2008; Rieck & Dugger Wadsworth, 1999).

### **Total inclusion.**

To achieve total inclusion, inclusive schools recognise that children might be at a disadvantage in comparison to others not only due to a recognized "impairment and disablement" which are "a common experience of humanity" (Mason & Rieser 1994) but also due to their first language being different from that used in the school, as well as family and economic difficulties among many other problems (Putnam, 1998; Thomas, 1997). Therefore, in line with the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), *categories defining special needs are removed* and it is recognised that children may be affected by a vast range of factors in their life, thus having different needs which can be catered for (Thomas, 1997). Inclusive schools need to develop their organisation and develop a language of practice (Slee, 2001). Inclusion is a process (Ainscow, Farrell and Tweddle, 2000) that everyone has a right to be included in. The models of disability that will be discussed below often arise from a social construction of people (Rieser and Mason, 1992).

## **Models of Disability and Inclusion.**

The medical model of disability has a number of functions, among which is that of normalising, "...caring and treating those characteristics of a person which make him/her different from the majority..." (Vlachou, 1997, p. 23). The problem is that disabilities are seen as arising almost exclusively from pathological impairments, or as a mental or physical inability to perform the so-called normal tasks of everyday living. Consequently, the ideology it passes on is that disabled students need fixing and/or changing in order to be able to survive in society. One of the assumptions used by the medical model is that, due to individual deficit, we must struggle to integrate disabled students into the mainstream of school life. In fact, the word integration gives the impression that the individuals to whom it refers, have been considered as being "...different, inferior, and that they have been segregated from mainstream practices ..." (Vlachou, 1997, p. 13). In close relation to this contention is another characteristic of the medical model of disability, namely labelling. The term 'label' implies that there is an unequal relationship, in which *'...powerful groups have the means and are able to define the way less powerful groups are perceived and treated'* (Vlachou, 1997, p. 39).

Philosophical and policy shifts have been experienced in recent years from the medical model of disability to the social model of disability by a number of countries. Oliver (1990) states that there is a danger in discussing issues related to disability, rather than the person, as we consider the various models of disabilities put forward. If we do not take a stance and start to act upon current research and models, we will end up spending our time on a theoretical knowledge of what we mean by the medical/individual or social model, or the psychological and the administrative or charity models of disability. Such issues will create barriers in perceiving the practical implications of the general real issues in disability, which are mainly oppression, discrimination, inequality and poverty. Such concerns encourage moves towards a 'grassroots' politics, with organisations controlled by disabled people having an increasingly central role, and a



challenge to traditional assumptions that disability was a 'personal tragedy' (Barnes and Mercer, 2004, p. 1). Viewing the social model as an instrument for socio-political critique, Colin Barnes (2003) states that

... the social model of disability is, first and foremost, a focus on the environmental and social barriers which exclude disabled people from mainstream society. It makes a clear distinction between impairment and disability; the former refers to biological characteristics of the body and the mind, and the latter to society's failure to address the needs of people with 'perceived' impairments. (ibid. p. 2)

Oliver (1995, p.30), who has been centrally involved from the outset in the social model of disability, tried to conceptualize models of disability as the binary distinction between what he referred to as the individual and social models of disability. Dealing with the individual leads to an individual plan, which tends to be non-oppressive, as it is structured around the individual's strengths and needs. Disabled people challenged the individual/medical model of disability and describe 'disability' not as a personal tragedy but as one where disabled people face daily barriers in society. Disabled people, who felt that the medical/individual model does not provide an adequate explanation for their exclusion from mainstream society, set the social model forward.

The social model is a direct challenge to the medical/individual models of disability, where the problems associated with disabled students are described and prescribed for within a medical discourse. Oliver (2004) gives an overview of the origins of the model. As concluded in one of his papers, the Disability Movement is a valuable tool and, if used properly, "the social model... could become the hammer of justice and freedom for disabled people" (Oliver, 2004, p. 12). Society needs this "hammer of justice" because, whereas the medical model of disability is based on the assumption that the individual is 'disabled' by their impairment, "... the social model of disability reverses the causal chain to explore how social constructed barriers have disabled people with a perceived impairment" (Barnes and Mercer,

2003, pp. 1-2). The social model of disability makes a distinction between impairment and disability. As stated by Goodley (2002), The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) was amongst the first to provide this distinction in its 1976 Fundamental Principle document. According to this document, impairment means 'lacking or having a defect in a body part while disability is the exclusion of people from mainstream social activities by contemporary social organisation' (p. 31).

This distinction is not only important, but is central to the social model of disability. As argued by Tremain (2002), impairment and disability are on the same side of the coin and therefore, in this sense, impairment itself can be said to be part of the wider processes of disability (Goodley, 2001; Goodley and Rapley, 2002).

Shakespeare and Watson (2002) state that replacing the traditional, 'medical model' view of disability with a social model view, in which the problems arise from social oppression, was and is very liberating for disabled individuals. Whilst the social model does not deny that some illnesses may have disabling consequences, it strives to understand disability and impairment, and its goal is to work towards the creation of a non-discriminatory culture within society. Vlachou (1997) argued that the concern for defining issues of disability and integration solely from the medical model of disability has '*been used to cover the deficiencies of ordinary schools in responding to and educating all children*' (p. 12). Social model theorists understand all societies as disabling, because they fail to meet the diverse needs of its population. Therefore, the social model of disability is the starting point for understanding the needs of disabled students by addressing the social factors that contribute to lost individual identities, potentials and opportunities. 'To join the struggle of disabled people against a disabilist society means first of all to internalise, as an able-bodied person that society is disabilist' (Vlachou, 1997, p. 39). Furthermore Shakespeare (1993) argues

... important in the formation of disabled people's own identity, just as it is in breaking down patterns of prejudice and discrimination. In making 'personal troubles' into 'public issues', disabled people are affirming the validity and importance of their own identity, rejecting both the victimizing tendencies of society and their own socialisation (p. 263).

Indeed, it is important to explore complex issues that may cause ambiguity and directly challenge the social model positioning on particular issues, just as Shakespeare (2006) does in his book *Disability Rights and Wrongs* (2006), where he confronts the British disability movement and calls for accurate and informed positioning on issues including the social model, an aversion to medical professionals and interventions, and a rejection of charitable models to disability. Shakespeare argues that the social model's silence on the issue of impairment proves that it has got it wrong. The social model, with its primary focus on barriers to equality rather than individual impaired bodies, together with the basic principle where the person is not central to the barriers that surround him or her but society is seen to clearly embrace an assertive and positive approach to impairment issues. Now, in this way, the social model positively addresses the continuing influence that medical/professional support services have on disabled people's lives. The very fact that current inclusive education policy is informed by the social model of disability demonstrates that it offers a clear direction for change, thus improving disabled students' position in society through social, economic and political change: 'current policy is informed by the social model of disability that an ability to participate in the spatial, economic, political and social life of one's community is a prerequisite to citizenship' (Ryan, 1997 as cited in Milner, 2009, p. 48).

Disability issues and inclusive practices should be perceived from an inclusive setting rather than being the personal tragedy view of what excludes. In recognising a positive view of disability, it is essential that this is set in the context of the social model of disability; yet, the oppression and discrimination faced by disabled students should also be taken into consideration in order to construct proper critical perspectives of such

practices and policies. Mladenov (2004) states that the Social Model of Disability is the main instrument for critical reflection, when considering daily living situations of disabled students. Nonetheless, several writers, particularly those coming from a feminist perspective, have found the British social model problematic. Liz Crow (1996) presented her reflections on the failure of the model to take into consideration the personal experience of pain and limitation, which is often part and parcel of impairment.

Crow (1996) believes the social model of disability should be more relevant to the lives of disabled students, and thus she questions and suggests reformation of the social model. The social model theory rests on the distinction between impairment as an attribute of the individual body or mind, and disability as a relationship between a person with impairment and society. A twofold division is established between the biological and the social (Oliver, 1996). Therefore, it is not adequate to deny differences and their social implications for change in planning and structure. The impairment should be considered. In neglecting its relevance, it might lead to some unfortunate consequences where attitudes towards inclusion that values differences are never created within a true inclusive society.

It is no doubt the case that activists who have worked tirelessly within the disability movement for many years have found it necessary to present disability in a straightforward, uncomplicated manner in order to convince a very sceptical world that disability can be reduced or eliminated by changing society, rather than by attempting to change disabled people themselves (French, 1993, p. 24).

## Evaluating the social model of disability

In evaluating the social model of disability, one must also delve into the literature from the perspective of the critics of the different models of disabilities.

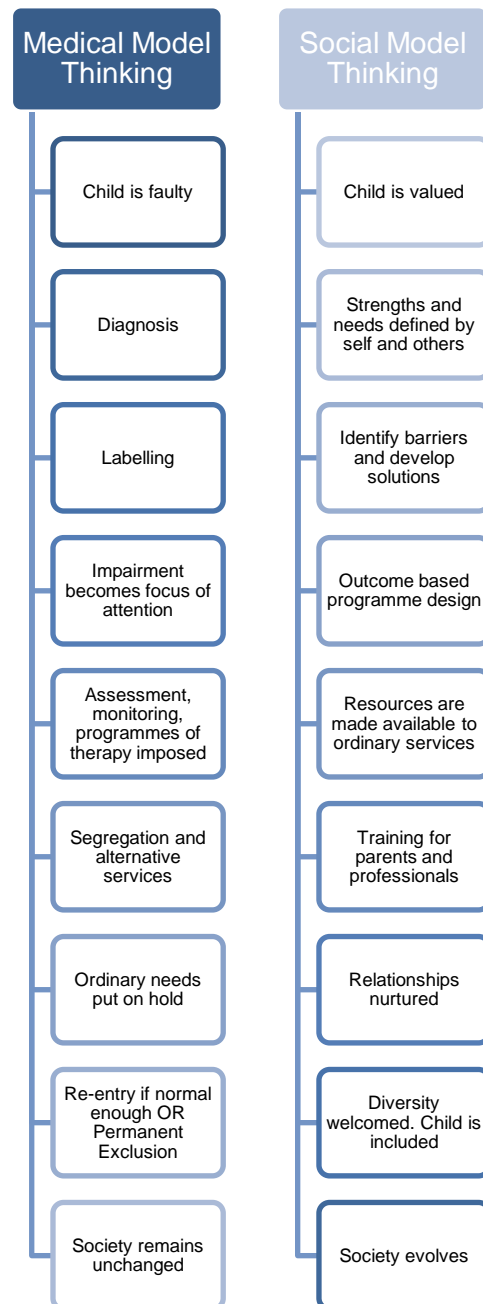


Figure 1.  
The medical model versus the social model of disability in schools (Adapted from Mason & Rieser, 1994)

## **Criticism of the medical model and individual model**

Giangreco (2004), in his self-advocate's reflections on the impact of specialised services on disabled students who make use of such services, sets clear the emotions of children who are sent for hours of therapy away from ordinary, healthy, child-orientated environments and practical, social goals. These children showed re-active behaviour and were overwhelmed by feelings. This was clearly observed, especially in the higher classes in primary schools. Also, children who were taken for therapy during school hours returned to class with more challenging behaviour, because they felt distanced and sometimes disrupted.

Critics of the medical model and individual model of disability state that the whole dimension of a person is generally ignored until the persons are 'normalised' and 'cured' (Rieser and Mason, 1994). It is pertinent to point out that often disabled students are not given a choice or voice in society. The emotions and autonomy of disabled students are usually disregarded.

## **The social construction of disability.**

Separating the biological from the social perspective raises real concerns about the starting point of disability theory and its impact upon politics and practice. Nevertheless, the social model has limitations in its explanation of the social construction of disability since it has not clarified what creates and maintains social barriers; as Chappell (1998) puts it: it is an excluded category marked as "the biological we cannot sociologise" disability from the perspective of a psycho-social and emotional dimension

Considering disability and inclusive practices from a psycho-social and emotional dimension (Thomas, 2003; Swain, 2004) provides a wider perspective of the individual. Nevertheless it has its limitations because of its predisposition to retreat into the subjectivity of the individual's and the therapist's own bodily experiences. Therefore it follows that one moves away

from attending to the “empirical features of the impaired individual’s interaction with the material world” (Williams & Busby, 2000, p. 174).

In spite of these limitations, however, the social model can “turn the world upside down in a manner, since it requires us to question our framing of the relationship between individual experience and social circumstances” (Williams & Busby, 2000, p. 178). The endeavour to include all children, however disabled, in one mainstream educational system will not make sense unless the difference between the ‘social’, and the ‘medical’ or ‘individual’ model of disability is understood (Williams & Busby, 2000). The social model philosophy needs to be transparent in an inclusive school where no labels are given to students, classrooms or teachers (Sapon-Shevin, 1990). The social model of disability contributes to the social relationships and social living experiences of everyone. In ‘an ethically ideal’ society, where opportunities develop and the specific resources students need to participate are universally available, categorization of students will become less relevant. An extension of the social model of disability is the affirmation model of disability (Swain & French, 2000).

### **The affirmation model of disability.**

The affirmation model of disability is viewed as an extension, because it includes disability culture, personal identity as shaped by disability and impairment, and a personal acceptance of impairment. It recognises a positive view of disability by allowing for the recognition of positive social identity and life experience. In fact, this model is very important in effectively including disabled students in mainstream schools, because many times disabled students are being isolated from other disabled students and are encouraged to identify only with non-disabled students. This position leads schools to devalue the world of disabled students.

Elements of Sen and Nussbaum’s capability approach are another perspective that helps us to understand disability within the constructs of

education and the disabled student. This approach is said to place equity and quality in education within the social justice framework (Terzi, 2008). The capability approach gives education a central role in individual development. It is also identified as being the foundation on which to build other capabilities.

These three models of disability, the medical (individual), the social and the affirmation models play a partial role in the understanding of disability, giving us an idea of what it means to be a disabled student. Each of us understands disability differently, depending on which model we were taught and how we experienced both the implementation of the model being played out in our day to day lives. Although each model has its contribution to the understanding of disability, no one model on its own can explain disability (Shakespeare, 1999).

The way forward to eliminating discriminatory barriers, invalidating, dismissing, normalising, and limiting disabled students, is therefore to keep in mind the medical aspect of the disability and at the same time focus on the social and the affirmation models whilst challenging one's own attitudes, assumptions and position around disability and inclusive education. In a fully accessible society, the main feature would be the 'universal recognition that all structures have to be built and all activities have to be organised for the widest range of human abilities' (Wendell, 1996, p. 55).

In materialising the idea of disability (Thomas, 1999) it is not enough to look for changes in the individual exhibits; in organising and planning activities one also needs to acknowledge the changes in environment, which include and influence the attitudes and expectations of the individuals. Such positioning requires educators to think about the environment that surrounds the learners and should target the development of a quality life around social justice, equity, and practical fulfilment. Historically it has been argued that disabled students have been excluded from the opportunity of being educated alongside their non-disabled peers and have been denied access



to the mainstream curriculum. The ideal aim is to pursue a quality education for all through the removal of all forms of school exclusion:

The intent of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is that children with disabilities should be educated [and should be given the opportunity to take part in activities within the community] with their typically developing peers to the greatest extent possible (1997 amendments) (Fraser, 2004, p. 169).

To denote what level of environment there is in a school, one needs to scrutinize the school culture which is deemed to play a role in the development of effective inclusive schools.

### **School Culture**

School culture has been linked to effective inclusive schools (Ainscow, 1995; Alton-Lee, 2003; Carrington, 1999); Dyson et al., 2004). It is a very complex phenomenon and has been noted to be an intricate and illusive notion (Prosser, 1999), a social experience (Corbett, 1999), pluralistic, subjective and dynamic (Rossman, Corbett & Firestone, 1999). School culture is often used interchangeably with terms such as school climate, ethos, atmosphere or character, and these terms are assumed to be a common phenomenon (Prosser, 1999).

Each school develops its own unique culture based upon the traditions, philosophy and aims underpinning the school and the way in which these are then translated into daily school practice (Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Stoll, 1999). Structures, policies, perceptions, attitudes and practices are all affected by inclusive thinking (Carrington, 1999; Thomas 1985). Inclusive education emphasizes the building of cohesive cultures around values and practices that respect difference. School culture is about “shared language” (Rossman, Corbett & Firestone, 1999). Shared language is the understandings that emerge from the interactions of a given group (Cresswell, 2005), and are noticeable by behaviour and practice (Rossman,

Corbett & Firestone, 1999). To gain an understanding of a school's culture one needs to study the shared language together with the assumptions of the members of staff. These assumptions can be studied through 'long term anthropological research, consisting of focused observation, interviews, and the collaboration of the researcher with the members of an organisation to systematically identify their underlying assumptions' (Zollers et al., 1999, p.160).

This further supports my positioning as an insider in this research, making it possible for me to understand the staff's attitudes and assumptions in the context of the school's culture in their practice of including disabled students in everyday school life.

To achieve an inclusive school culture addressing the inclusion of disabled students it is necessary that all the stakeholders make explicit the embedded values of diversity, membership and collaboration in every aspect of school practice. Dyson et al. (2003), in an extensive review of the literature around how mainstream schools respond to including disabled students, found school culture to be a critical factor. They found that the norms, values and accepted ways of doing things in schools based upon inclusive principles resulted in the improved participation of all students. A successful inclusive school must start with the acknowledgement of the diversity of learning needs among all students (Ellins & Porter, 2005). 'All young people should be valued together as individuals so that the differences between them can be acknowledged without prejudice' (Wedell, 2008, p. 127).

Research has indicated that inclusive education can only become a reality when schools adjust their culture and ethos (McLeskey & Waldron 2007). Carrington (1999) is passionate in stating "it is the thoughts, words, deeds, and hearts of members of the school community that create or stifle change" (p. 142).

School culture is also based upon the organisational set-up of a

school together with the value systems, beliefs, and personal experiences that each individual brings to the school. Carrington and Elkins (2005) reported that in their study inclusive schools blurred the lines between disabled and non-disabled students and special and mainstream provisions, whilst non-inclusive schools perpetuated medical model thinking and maintained rigid teaching methods and school structures. When individuals do not support a philosophy, it is challenging to encourage these individuals to shift beliefs (Avramidis et al. 2002, Radtke 2003). Including disabled students in regular schools requires a complete change in the thinking of school administrators, teachers, learning support assistants, students and parents. Schein (1985) suggests that cultures are about the fundamental levels of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation operating unconsciously to define how they view themselves and their working contexts. These values and the extent to which they include the acceptance and celebration of difference and a commitment to offering educational opportunities to all students, coupled with the extent to which they are shared across a school staff, relate to the extent to which students are enabled to participate (Kugelmass, 2001).

As Fullan (1991) writes, factors affecting implementation “form a system of variables that interact to determine success or failure” (p. 67). Ainscow, Booth et al. (2006) demonstrate how staff within some schools reconsidered their assumptions, thus resulting in developing new ways of working. In some schools this led to significant changes in the way problems were defined and addressed. The way in which the norms of teaching are socially negotiated within the everyday context of the communities of practice within the schools (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994) are evidence of how the culture of the workplace affects how teachers see their work and, indeed, their students (Skidmore, 2004). The need to create and define communities of practice that promote professional development for all teachers and LSAs, while eliminating the isolation of teachers and LSAs in our schools, is a critical feature in the practices of an inclusive school. This in turn demonstrates that to implement sound inclusive practices requires processes

of social learning, pointing to the importance of cultural factors. Changing the strong academic individualistic culture that exists within a school is difficult to achieve, particularly within today's context of having many competing pressures (Fullan, 1991). Barnes and Mercer (1997) point out that stakeholders must develop a positive attitude, because this helps them collaborate and develop an inclusive culture. The presence of disabled students in a school, who require a different process of teaching in order to continue the process of learning, may become the vehicle to explore a more collaborative culture where all obstacles that would stop the growth of the disabled student are removed. Nias (1989) describes a culture of collaboration developing as both the product and the cause of shared social and moral beliefs. In this way school staff would support one another by creating an open system, acknowledging their responsibilities towards putting in place a dynamic learning process to serve students.

Embracing this inclusive culture depends on the process of dialogue, collaboration, reviewing and refining current teaching and learning processes. Such a conceptualization means that we cannot divorce inclusion from the contexts within which it is developing nor the social relations that might sustain or limit that development (Dyson, 2006). In fact, an inclusive culture is the sharing of ideas from all perspectives, where students, teachers and parents work and learn together despite differences to create success for a common cause and where difference of thought and opinions is respected.

### **The Inclusive School**

Inclusive schools are characterised by a philosophy that celebrates diversity, rewards collaboration among its staff, pupils and outside professionals, and teaches students how to help, support and learn from one another. Aniscom's (1991) typology of five characteristics seems to be a feature of 'moving schools' towards becoming more inclusive learning environments. These factors consist of: effective leadership, not only by the

head teacher but spread throughout the school; involvement of the staff, students and community in school policies and decisions; a commitment to collaborative planning; attention to the potential benefits of inquiry and reflection; and a policy for staff development that focuses on classroom practice (Ainscow, 1999, p. 12).

Most studies of inclusive education conclude that there are identifiable features in schools with an inclusive ethos. These include high expectations of all pupils, a flexible, dynamic response to the needs of individual students, partnership with other schools and professionals, support for the child, and effective leadership. Dyson and Millward (2000) point out the necessity for innovation and collaboration between professionals rather than each working on his own. Another factor they identify as important is the culture of the school and whether it is considered a learning environment for all; indications of this would be a culture of continuous professional development and reflective practice. However, in order to achieve effective inclusive education there has to be a shared understanding of the social constructs of disability. Inclusive practices need to be embedded in the school's routine practices rather than as an appendage.

In a case study carried out by Dyson and Millward (2000), four schools were studied to learn more about their practices and their level of inclusion. A number of common themes emerged, all of which are characteristic of inclusive schools. In each school there was a leadership that was committed to inclusive practices promoting school development on the basis of those principles. In addition, the four schools "shared an attempt to dismantle barriers, which have traditionally typified special needs education, and to replace them with a response to diversity" (Dyson and Millward, 2000, p. 134). Also, the move to inclusion in the four schools under study was seen as involving a process of structural change. This change process was not considered as a once-and-for-all structural reorganization, but a continuing dynamic process in which practices had to be continually reorientated in a more inclusive direction. Added to this, for each Head of school, "...inclusion

was more a part of their personal agenda than an externally-imposed requirement” (Dyson and Millward, 2000, p.137).

In another case study carried out in a rural town in Scotland, Allen (1995) came out with two main qualities that characterized inclusion at the local school. The first quality was that inclusion was not static but a continuous process which is subject to change. The case study also demonstrated that students were not included or excluded once and for all, but moved in and out of mainstream in a response to a variety of factors. Additionally, social inclusion was found to be the weakest, and could vary from one moment to the next depending on the interaction between students (Allen, 1995, p. 61).

There are a number of factors that either promote or inhibit inclusion in schools. According to the researchers, Lakeside Community College “was the one which most closely fitted the definition of inclusive schooling, which would be recognised not only in England but internationally” (Dyson and Millward, 2000, p. 39). One of the teachers working in this college made this statement: ‘These kids are very much part of this school. They are not just a statement. The aims of the school are that the kids are here to achieve their potential’ (Dyson and Millward, 2000, p. 39).

This college was guided by a number of policies and strategies. Firstly, the college created a pervasive support system for disabled students that enabled them to participate as far as possible in mainstream activities. The college also organized its learning support to be more than simply ‘an extra pair of hands’ in the classroom. Instead, the aim was that each team would develop expertise in a particular area, such as literacy and behaviour. The final element, and perhaps the most important, in this College’s approach to become an inclusive school was its work on attitudinal change within the community. ‘The College regarded itself as having a more general educative role which aimed in the Principle’s words “to shift attitudes and approaches” throughout the community’ (Dyson and Millward, 2000, p. 45).

Whilst the number of schools working towards inclusive practices is always on the increase, 'the problem still exists of finding forms of schooling that enable all students to experience success in their learning' (Ainscow, 1999, p.180).

A major preoccupation is how to teach successfully in such diverse classrooms. As put by Ainscow (1999) "sometimes so called differentiation strategies ... can set limits on our expectations of certain students in a way to lower their performance" (p. 53). Also, in countries where almost all students attend mainstream schools, schools 'can find themselves managing diversity simply by consigning large numbers of those students to special education programmes within those schools' (Dyson and Millward, 2000, p. 16).

Very gradually there has been some recognition that 'school for all' will not be achieved by transplanting special education thinking and practice into mainstream schools. In fact, the practise of special education within mainstream schools is in total contrast and the polar of what inclusion stands for, that of "increasing the participation of pupils in, and reducing their exclusion from school curricula, cultures and communities" (Ainscow, 1999, p.9). Stainback & Stainback (1992) point out that 'these students need more than mere placement in the mainstream. They also need to be included as an equal and valued member of the classroom' (p. 65).

Within the field of education, research has mostly focused on cognitive, academic and social outcomes for disabled pupils (Staub et al. 1994). However, more research has begun to redirect its attention towards how integrated and inclusive schools affect non-disabled students (Helmstetter et al. 1994). Bradely (1994) suggests that research on the views of young people towards inclusion is underdeveloped. Of the few studies investigating attitudes towards inclusion, most indicate that including disabled students in mainstream schools has resulted in positive attitudes on behalf of the able-bodied pupils and teachers alike (Moore, 1998). Students' attitudes towards disability were investigated by Helmstetter et al. (1994) and they found that non-disabled students developed a more positive attitude

towards disability based upon the experience of disabled pupils within an educational context. An inclusive setting was found to promote student friendships and facilitate understanding and empathy. Student acceptance of inclusion was enhanced by knowledge, exposure and experience of disabled pupils (Butler-Hayes, 1995). In 1990 Peck et al found that non-disabled students who developed relationships with disabled peers had improved self-concept, a growth in social cognition, an increased tolerance towards others, and personal acceptance.

Others engage in a discourse different from the mainstream, but which they regard as just as relevant and worthy of respect. Tolerance enriches us as human beings, whilst intolerance impoverishes the human condition. Clement (2006) believes that a culture of silence exists that buries the negative aspects of impairment beneath a plethora of affective policy aspirations.

## **Leadership**

As mentioned in the above sections on school culture and the inclusive school, in order to develop and maintain a school which will include disabled students one requires strong leadership based on a well-defined vision of the core values of inclusive education. Each individual school needs to develop its own vision and beliefs to facilitate a community of learners. In keeping within the social model of disability, school leadership must in the first place focus on the needs of all students rather than the needs of the disabled students only, as the development of all students is enhanced to the extent to what they feel as a sense of belonging, caring, and community in school (Noddings 1984). Secondly, school leaders should be talking about school improvement rather than about the referent inclusion.

School improvement means change and, since creating inclusive schools often involves significant change for school communities, heads of school are in a unique position to affect this change (Praisner, 2003).



Accomplishing significant change in any school that is rich in history and practices demands school leaders to focus on the process of change itself (Burnstein et al., 2004). Many studies support the idea that administrative leadership is essential to long term successful change, and school leaders in the context of the school influence the process of change (Avissar, 2000; Kugelmass, 2003; Praisner, 2003; Riehl, 2000).

Heads of school are in the unique position to model inclusive attitudes, beliefs and practices, and the modelling of such behaviour has been shown to advance the acceptance and inclusion of disabled students (Praisner, 2003). Heads of school are also in a powerful position to create a shared vision towards an inclusive school (Ainscow, 1999; Hanson et al., 2001). There are several characteristics associated with heads of school who have led inclusive schools (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Thousand, Stainback & Stainback, 1992).

These heads of school are able to take risks and are not afraid to say no to something different. They also act as proponents of inclusive practice in their respective schools. Another characteristic is that they have the ability to invest in relations. These heads of school 'go the extra mile' with staff, parents and students, working hard to build trust and promote changes by sharing information honestly with all involved. Effective heads of school are accessible to students, their parents and staff. Another characteristic is that of being reflective. Heads of school who are reflective use information that they have gathered from a variety of sources to develop informed approaches for action. Collaboration is another characteristic of an effective head of school. Such heads have the ability to share leadership with staff, being aware that teaching teams, who share the same goals, are more effective than one administrator working on his own. These heads of school make it possible for teachers and support staff to work collaboratively by creating time for teams to meet, plan and teach together. Intentional is the final characteristic, implying that heads of school displaying this characteristic

have both a strong sense of direction and the ability to infuse their core values, beliefs and attitudes into building a positive school culture.

### **Perceptions and Attitudes to Disabled Students**

Both perceptions and attitudes are likely to have a major impact on inclusive education. There are several groups whose perceptions and attitudes are pertinent to the inclusive discourse, namely policy makers, heads of school, teachers, parents and both non-disabled and disabled students alike.

One of the major concerns of our society today is the effect of prejudicial attitudes and stereotyped thinking on the different social relationships (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). Educators have been challenged to eliminate these barriers to positive attitudes. We learn attitudes to disability early in life from various strong cultural influences, from media, community and school, and from the language and literature of the culture we live in. Prejudice must be directly addressed in schools. Inclusion is a realistic practical issue (Azzopardi, 2005). By simply placing disabled students in mainstream schools without pedagogical dealing with attitudes is insignificant and damaging. Schools need to become aware of the need to develop skills to deal with differences and attitudes. Literature notes that the attitude of the head of school towards including disabled students in their school is a very crucial factor in the inclusion of disabled students. Praisner (2003) found that heads of school with positive attitudes towards inclusive education are more likely to include disabled students in inclusive classrooms, as opposed to heads without such knowledge and negative attitudes.

Teachers' interactions with students influence students' perceptions of one another and their relationships (Montague & Rinaldi, 2001). Morrison and Ursprung (1990) show a grounded need to plan educational programmes that aim to create a positive attitude towards disabled individuals.

Classroom teachers, counsellors, and other people working to implement such projects know these endeavours must be based on the assumption that the dissemination of accurate information about disabilities will lead to increased positive attitudes and reduction of social rejection, stigmatization, and prejudice (ibid. p. 1883).

The information disseminated must not only include simply the medical condition, and if or whether a child is taking any medication, but also the baggage of needs of the particular individual as well as how such needs can be addressed. Inclusion is a process that goes beyond disabled students, and looks at the various ways students are both alike and different from one another. Sapon-Shevin (2007) indicates that the aim of schools should be to create classrooms in which all children see themselves reflected and validated by the curriculum, attitudes and classroom practices.

Inclusion, or organised placement of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Cook, 2001), has certainly been one of the major topics in education for the last two decades (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). Although the movement of inclusive education has gained momentum, a key element in the successful implementation of the policy is the views of the educators who have the major responsibility of implementing it, that is the teachers. However, it was not until quite recently that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) became the focus of extensive research (Avramidis & Kalyva; Jobe & Rust, 1996). Teachers' attitudes should be conducive to the development and implementation of inclusive education. Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden (2002) discuss the importance of attitudes and also state the difficulty of changing attitudes. Radtke (2003) says that, due to additional barriers, inclusion is not always easy to achieve. When teachers adopt a negative attitude towards inclusive education, it can be very difficult to achieve a sound inclusive practice. If one does not believe in the effectiveness of inclusive methods, then the implementation of inclusive practices might not be effective.

Attitudes do not only have an effect on whether a teacher implements inclusive practices or not, but they also affect other important ingredients

necessary for inclusive education to be successful. Barnes and Mercer (1997) found that having a negative attitude could indirectly create a lack of collaboration amongst staff members. Interestingly, teamwork is extremely important in the creation of inclusive school communities, and is in fact one of the major changes that the school in this study took up as a strategy towards implementing a whole school culture towards an inclusive way of school life. Ultimately, inclusion is not simply a new paradigm; it is part and parcel of daily living and requires a whole culture to change in order to be able to create a culture of inclusion, as discussed in several works by French and Swain (2004). Schools must create a school culture that believes in the practices of inclusions, and teachers need to develop different attitudes towards today's diverse classrooms.

Although some teachers feel that there should be inclusion, we cannot overlook the fact that having mixed ability classrooms also creates challenges (Turnbull, 2006). The biggest issues, as always, are time and behaviour. It may be challenging for teachers to cope with a whole classroom, especially when they have students who need more help and time to complete work they are given (Turnbull, 2006).

The biggest problem many teachers face is completing the syllabus on time and abiding by the school curriculum. This is also the case in the Maltese context where teachers find it extremely hard to finish everything in time and may have to rush through certain topics to do this. In an inclusive classroom this may be even more stressful, because disabled students are sometimes left behind and, therefore, find it hard to cope (Mercer & Mercer, 2005). Pavri (2000) argued that at times teachers have been found to use social skills to judge the quality of a student's performance, with the result that poor social skills snowball into poor achievement and less reinforcement opportunities. Whilst some teachers accept disabled students as part and parcel of their class, taking full responsibility for their learning, there are other teachers who accept these students in class but leave their learning in the hands of the learning support assistant, therefore not taking responsibility for

their learning. Whilst some of these different attitudes could be innate, some might have developed through time. Fuchs and Fuchs (2000) state that some teachers may be *inclusionists*, rather than *full inclusionists*, introducing these new standpoints, stating that the inclusionist will only include students depending on the severity of the disabled student's impairment, and full inclusionists alter and modify the environment to accommodate all students.

In conclusion, Barnes and Mercer (1997) point out that stakeholders must develop a positive attitude because it helps them to collaborate in order to develop inclusive practices.

### **Teaching Teams: A Collaborative Partnership**

In inclusive schools the most likely individuals to be members of the team are the parents, the teacher and the facilitator team, as well as the disabled student and close peers, since the student's voice and peer support are important in decision making about their own education (Stainback and Stainback, 1992). They are also the people who will be directly involved in the daily living, teaching, education, and supporting of the disabled student. Placement of the disabled student really does matter and everything we do as educators needs to become portable. Supports for the disabled student need to be in place, but only as special and strategic as necessary. The most critical strategy for creating successful learning experiences for all children, regardless of ability and disability, is teamwork. Collaborative teamwork comes about when all members of the team have common goals and a shared understanding (Garner, 2001). Family involvement is a must, and families must be helped to understand the instructional content of each subject in order to contribute effectively in their child's school life.

Parents and professionals are constantly bringing new meaning to what constitutes an appropriate and effective inclusive education and what facilitates effective partnerships among professionals, families and others involved in the education of disabled students. Collaborative teamwork is

hardly a new idea. It has been put forward as a strategy that could improve education for disabled students (Whitehouse, 1951, in Stainback & Stainback, 1992). However, to this date, parental involvement in their children's assessment, programme development and the evaluation of their progress is limited. Parents of disabled children often feel they share and carry their children's label and are, therefore, perceived by the other team members as part of the problem, which in turn limits parent participation at a collaborative level. Research on attitudes of school personnel and parents indicates significant intra-team differences regarding the way members think about some of the most basic issues pertaining to inclusive education such as: (a) appropriateness of general class placement, (b) educational programme content, (c) the need for natural versus specialist supports, (d) criteria for determining support services provision, and (d) who should retain authority to make support service decisions (Giangreco, Edelman, MacFarland, & Luiselli, 1997). These data suggest that many teams do not have a 'shared framework', meaning an ever-evolving set of beliefs, values, or assumptions about education, children, families, and professionals, to which all team members agree and upon which they base their actions (Giangreco, 1996a). Developing a shared framework helps identify the common denominators that exist among team members who often hold diverse opinions. If a group does not work to clarify a shared framework on an ongoing basis, it will perpetually interfere with their work and they will be unlikely to become a true team.

Team members are constantly struggling with redefining roles, relationships and responsibilities in order to collaborate more effectively in inclusive school environments.

The nature of the relationships between teachers and class facilitators (or Learning Support Assistants - LSAs) is constantly changing. In schools, the instructional strategies associated with each discipline are among the most significant contributions team members make in the collaborative teamwork process. The incorporation of different perspectives increases the

effectiveness of the educational experience. A team's diversity is truly its strength. The collaboration and interdependence required for planning, decision-making, role release and ongoing role support are challenging, particularly for new teams. Teachers who have previously worked autonomously must reach consensus with another educator working in their classroom. Organisationally, there must be structures to develop new approaches to the organisation of teaching teams, allowing them to collaborate with one another and work with all the students in their classes. Cultural norms and expectations for collaboration must be developed within schools and become a part of school life. All too frequently teachers work individually. Consequently, the outcome of the teacher's work has little or no effect, and is not affected by the actions of other educators. In the end, teachers do their own work with their class and LSAs do their own work with the disabled student/s in class. In teaching teams, each member works to achieve the common goals within a trans-disciplinary framework (Lyon & Lyon, 1980). Members of the team both depend on and support other people to achieve the goals agreed upon (Villa, 1996).

## **Classroom Management**

Inclusive classrooms demand attention to how teachers manage and organise their classrooms (Martin & Sugarman, 1993). When including disabled students alongside their non-disabled peers, teachers must review their strategies and plan to meet the diverse range of abilities of not only the disabled student, but all students in their class (McNary et al. 2005). For effective teaching and learning to materialise, teachers must execute appropriate management strategies, which include the application of appropriate behaviour management techniques, curriculum modifications and the use of inclusive teaching strategies, which are non-discriminatory and age appropriate.

Procedures and routines provide a structure that many students need to be successful. Procedures and routines build into the classrooms supported by a visual timetable provide predictability. Research indicates that both procedures and routines are cornerstones of classroom management and are critical to effective teaching and learning (Marzano et.al. 2003). Giving both verbal and visual instructions ensures that all the students in the class know what is expected of them.

Teachers need to establish clear expectations for behaviour that students understand (Weinstein, 2003). They also need to alert students to acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and students should play a part in the setting of class rules and consequences. This reduces inappropriate behaviour in the class and also facilitates the teacher in establishing discipline quickly (McPhillimy, 1996). However effective classroom management entails much more than decreasing the frequency or severity of inappropriate behaviour. Effective environments must be created so that they are academically and socially responsive to all students.

### **Inclusive Teaching Methods**

Since the implementation of an inclusive education policy in schools, mainstream classrooms have become more diverse, including students who are average, those who are above and below average, and those who require direct individualised support. The variety of students indicates that teachers cannot simply prepare lessons that are suitable for the average students in class, but must aim to include all types of learners. Authors such as Watson and Houtz (2002) and Hoover and Patton (2004) state that teachers must be creative and plan lessons that are suitable for a diverse range of abilities.

There are several inclusive practices that teachers can adopt. Amongst many these include providing flexible material and content, developing flexible and diverse teaching methods, assessing students



continuously, encouraging students to work together, adopting positive attitudes towards inclusive education, and developing working relationships amongst staff members.

Inclusion goes beyond integration; it implies going beyond placing a disabled student in a classroom but enabling him to participate during the lessons. A student's environment can be very influential and crucial for learning. With fixed uniform learning materials teachers are left with the reality of individualising instruction by providing supplementary adaptations or accommodations for disabled learners. Pisha and Stahl (2005) maintained that unfortunately few teachers have either the time or the expertise to adequately adapt the curriculum materials to meet the diverse needs of their students.

One critical barrier to individualising instruction is the curriculum itself. Cheminaise (2005) indicates that teaching methods and inaccessible curriculum materials could have an effect on students' learning process. Rather than offering multiple gateways to learning and understanding, the 'one size fits all' printed text-books and other resources that make up the general curriculum often serve as barriers (Rose & Meyer, 2002). While conventional materials are reasonably accessible to many students, they clearly present significant barriers for disabled students (Pisha & Coyne, 2001). Students, who are shown how to do a task by using different methods, might achieve the educational goal set by the teacher. Therefore, a conventional method is sometimes considered a barrier to reaching one's potential. According to Booth, Swann, Masterton, and Potts (1992) curricula must meet diverse educational needs.

However, the reality is that instruction is usually standardised and aimed at middle ability range. Wong, Kauffman, and Lloyd (1991), Cole (2005), and Dixon (1991), state that teachers should be flexible in their approach, differentiate on different levels, focus on strengths of the student, provide clear instructions, challenge the students, monitor individual progress, use multisensory aids, and allow students to learn from one

another (cooperative learning). These inclusive teaching methods were also proposed by, Booth, Ainscow, and Kingston (2006), in the Index for Inclusion. Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, and Jackson (2002) add a new dimension to the above-mentioned practices and refer to such a collection of practices as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Various research work show that UDL is effective: CAST in Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age by Rose & Meyer (ASCD, 2002), The Universally Designed Classroom (Rose, Meyer, & Hitchcock, Eds.; Harvard Education Press, 2005), and A Practical Reader in Universal Design for Learning (Rose & Meyer, Eds.; Harvard Education Press, 2006).

Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, and Jackson (2002) state that, UDL shows that inflexible curricular methods and materials act as barriers to diverse learners. Therefore, without curricular changes inclusion will never be realised for all students. What is interesting is that UDL is a classroom practice that is not only suitable, but also beneficial for all learners. The importance of a varied pedagogical approach, has been acknowledged by Peaterson and Hittee (2003) 'rather than offering content unsupported and leaving students' success to happenstance, privilege, or random discovery, we teach what is important... adopting the most effective methods so that all children will learn' (p. 12).

UDL proposes that the goals developed by teachers must be an appropriate challenge for all students, materials must be flexible and include multiple representations of content, methods must be flexible and diverse, and assessment must also be flexible, accurate and ongoing to provide the teacher with information as to whether to adjust instruction.

Approaching inclusion in this manner will contribute to a positive classroom culture, where differences are acknowledged and celebrated providing real life learning.

## Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is one of the practices that should be in place in an inclusive classroom. According to Gillies and Ashman (2000) cooperative learning has been proposed as a teaching strategy that promotes inclusion. Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1994) defined cooperative learning as a way for students to help each other to maximise their learning by the instructional use of small groups. Shulmon, Lotan and Whitcomb (1998) say that cooperative learning is a strategy that enhances academic, cognitive and attitudinal outcomes for students. Jacobs, Power and Inn (2002) define cooperative learning as “principles and techniques for helping students work together more effectively” (p. 9). It also improves social interaction, as it is used to help student communicate with one another socially and academically. Within a cooperative group, students help each other and have equal participation. Gillies and Ashman (2003) state that ‘*cooperative groups aim to create positive interdependence*’ (p. 37), which highlights the importance of people helping one another. Booth, Nes and Stromstad (2003) refer to this element as child-to-child resources. They say that students can be used as a resource for each other. Cooperative learning also develops “promotive interaction” (p. 37), in which children encourage and facilitate each other’s efforts. Finally, “individual accountability” (p. 38) is encouraged by ensuring students accept responsibility for their part of the task. The above three elements are the crucial characteristics and are to be found across different cooperative groups.

Mara Sapon-Shevin (1998) believes that cooperative learning should not be viewed as an activity but rather the entire curriculum should be based on cooperative learning strategies. In this way lessons and activities in class would be more participatory, hands-on, interactive and focused on multiple intelligences. These are all essential elements of cooperative learning. Therefore, Sapon-Shevin (1998) considers cooperative learning as a technique that teachers must embrace and for which they must implement strategies across the length and breadth of the curriculum. Gillies and

Ashman (2003) say that primarily cooperative learning techniques must be planned and organised. Murphy, Grey, and Honan (2005) state that the effectiveness of cooperative groups depend upon the way these groups are managed. Therefore, teachers must learn how to facilitate group tasks to ensure all students participate during the task.

Cooperative learning requires a change in the role of both teachers and students. Shulaman et al. (1998) call this a redefinition of roles, which according to them is not easy for teachers. According to Biott and Eason (1998) the students become responsible for their own learning and that of their peers. Gillies and Ashman (2003) say that the traditional educational system is accustomed to teacher-centred instruction, where the teacher provides the students with the content they need to know. However, when teachers do provide favourable conditions for their students, they indirectly offer opportunities for them to develop skills such as collaboration and social competencies (Biott and Eason, 1994). Cooperative learning provides the teacher with an opportunity to focus on student strengths and aims to develop each student's potential. These fundamental principles of inclusive education ensure that all students will be given every opportunity to access the curriculum, develop their skills, and thus helping each student reach their own potential.

### **Students' Social Development**

It has been established that, when inclusion is practiced fully within a school, it helps to foster more positive attitudes towards disabled students, and it also increases their pool of friendship (McCormick et al., 1999; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1999; Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999; Tanti Burlò et al., 1995; Soresi & Nota, 2007).

Researchers (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Rieck & Dugger Wadsworth, 1999) found that inclusion in comparison to segregation is beneficial to all students, both at the academic and at the social level. Benefits include

improvements in social skills, academic achievement, peer acceptance and long lasting friendships, self esteem, and the possibilities of better opportunities upon graduating (Biklen et al., as cited in Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1999; Kennedy, Shukla & Fryxell 1997 as cited in Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1999; McCormick et al., Saland & Garrick Duhaney, 1999; Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999).

There is a strong body of evidence on students' attitudes towards their disabled counterparts as cited above, showing that when disabled students are included into a general education classroom, where an inclusion policy is implemented as a whole school approach, then the students' attitudes toward disabled students become more positive. As for the effect on students' relationships, taking the above-mentioned research into consideration, it is assumed that the more accepting the students are of disabled students the stronger the relationships are between them. 'Knowledge, Skills, and ongoing experience set the stage for the development of genuine friendships between students with disabilities and their peers' (Walther-Thomas, 1997a as cited in Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999, pp. 223-224).

Students are often unprepared for the inclusion of classmates with a disability (Cooper et al., 1999; Katz & McClellan, 1997 as cited in Cooper, Griffith & Filer, 1999; McConkey, 1996) and those with disabilities also lack experience in developing relationships with their peers (Katz & McClellan, 1997 as cited in Cooper et al., 1999).

A lack of independence and mobility means it is often difficult for disabled students to make and maintain friendships. Studies by Tanti Burlò, Soresi, Nightingale and Xuereb (1995) and Salend and Duhaney (1999) show that inclusive relationships through a peer preparation programme yield both social and academic benefits for both disabled students and their peers. However, studies by Gold (1996) show that 4 out of 6 friendships in childhood for disabled students end there; 9 as cited in Vash & Crewe (2004). In a disabled student's life inclusive friendships are important, because by natural self detrogation, people with disability often feel unworthy

of such friendships (Vash & Crewe, 2004). With respect and equality in inclusion, society can come to an understanding that individuals with disability are people with feelings too (Murray, 2006). So while there is evidence in the literature to suggest that many disabled students are socially included in mainstream schools (Meyer, 2001; Farrell, 1997), there is a substantial body of research, which demonstrates the social isolation and difficulty that some of these students face in forming friendships. In the context of inclusive education this is worrying, not least because the notion of social inclusion underpins the philosophy of inclusion, but also because the quality of a person's life is highly dependent on the quality of their social relationships. Exclusion by peers and lack of friendship leads to loneliness, unhappiness and rejection (Chappell, 1994; McVilly, Stancliffe, Paramenter and Burton-Smith, 2006). Studies have shown that the loss of a sense of belonging also hinders school performance and decreases motivation for learning and schooling (Frostad and Pijl, 2007; Guralnick, Gottman and Hammond, 1996).

### **Learning Support Assistants (LSA)**

The use of Learning Support Assistants (also called teacher aids or paraprofessional) is a growing phenomenon in relation to the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream schools. Although as Giangreco, Edleman and Broer (2001) reports there is little evidence of the efficacy of paraprofessionals for improving the outcomes for disabled students. However, in Malta the contribution of LSA support has become fundamental to the inclusive educational experience of disabled students. Various titles are used for the extra support in class that accompanies a disabled student, Malta being no exception. Initially they were known as *facilitators* and now they are called Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). In Malta at school and classroom level there is a system of individual support in place for disabled students who attends mainstream schools. This level support is determined by the Statementing Moderating Panel and given as an entitlement to

disabled students to enable them to attend mainstream schools. It is important to note that the LSAs in this study are educated professionals not as sometimes referred to as “unqualified adults” (Ainscow, 2000). In state and church schools in Malta to be eligible to apply for the post of an LSA, candidates must be “qualified in not less than one (1) subject at Advanced Matriculation Level (minimum grade E), or a recognized appropriate comparable qualification, and four (4) passes at Ordinary Level Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) (Grade 1-5), or a recognized appropriate comparable qualification, or higher” ((DoI – GoM Gazette 18752, pp 5645-5652). Furthermore, when rank-ordered, applicants are given “due consideration” for other qualifications such as the Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education run by the University of Malta; Certificate in Education for Learning Support Assistants organized by the DES, or the; MCAST/BTEC National Diploma in Child’s Care Learning and Development. The DoI-GoM (2010) document further notes that LSAs are required to “follow professional development courses, in-service training programmes and/or an induction course as appropriate to their role and functions, as indicated by the Educational Directorates, College Principal or Head of School” (Article 6.1).

LSAs may either be trained to Diploma level by the University of Malta (UoM), or by the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) within the Maltese Ministry of Education, Employment and The Family. They are often trained by both entities. The DES periodically runs a ten-week induction certificate of attendance Course that is a pre-requisite to the 20-week Certificate in Education for Learning Support Assistants (Cini, 2011). Both are part-time course run after school hours.

The DES 20-week part-time course presents the basic philosophical framework of inclusive education as well as practical elements such as MAPs and IEPs. The 10-week 70-teaching-contact-hour Certificate of Attendance Course, Supporting Students with Individual Educational Needs is divided into seven themes with seven contact hours each, 21 contact hours on Child development, Implementation and evaluation of MAPs and IEPs and a four

weeks Practice Placement at the school where the course participant is employed at. The seven-hour study units are Principles of Inclusive Education, Child Development, Learning Processes, Working with Parents, Behaviour Management, Lesson Adaptations and Teaching Techniques and Teamwork. As indicated by the study units, this course is meant to introduce participants to the main concepts of general teaching and the classroom environment. The 20-week course expands on these concepts.

### **The Programme for Inclusive Education**

The Programme for Inclusive education within the Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Education, UoM, runs a 60-ECTS Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education. This Diploma is comparable to first year undergraduate coursework. It is also a part-time evening course and is delivered over two years (52 weeks). Apart from study units focusing on the philosophical and sociological frameworks and ideologies of Inclusive education and transdisciplinary teamwork, diploma students are exposed to theories of learning and human development, diverse learning needs, and implementation of inclusive education from a planning, implementation and evaluative perspective. As also carried out in the DES-run course, students are exposed to MAPs and IEPs. The diploma also addresses specific techniques such as task-based learning, behaviour modification strategies, alternative and augmentative communication, as well as numeracy and literacy development. Furthermore, students specialise either in primary or secondary level of support. They also have a 28-hour elective study unit that they can choose out of a choice of five (hearing-impaired, visually Impaired, Challenging behaviour, Multiple disabilities, Physical disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties).

LSAs at the school in the study play a significant role in enhancing the learning opportunities of disabled students in collaboration with the classroom teacher, parents and other members of staff. LSAs are there to



ensure that the disabled student in class receives his individual curricular entitlement and that his learning needs are met. The presence of a LSA in the class has been seen to be beneficial, but can also be a potential barrier to participation (Ainscow, 2000).

### **LSA barrier.**

One barrier is the proximity of the LSA in relationship to the disabled student, reducing peer interaction, encouraging learnt helplessness, reducing teacher contact time and a loss of personal control (Giangreco et al., 1997). One of the barriers in the literature in relation to LSA support is the practice of the class teacher handing over the responsibility for the disabled students' learning to the LSAs (Broer, Doyle & Giangreco, 2005). Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) reported that when a disabled student is seen as the responsibility of the LSA, their status is reduced in the eyes of their peers and they are likely to be isolated by their peers. This is experienced further when LSAs work in with disabled students in isolated areas or resource rooms, away from the class setting (Ainscow et al., 2005). In the playground Broer, Doyle and Giangreco (2005) found that LSAs act as protectors of disabled students particularly in the area of peer teasing and bullying which Broer et al. argues denies disabled students the opportunities for decision making and setting them apart from their peers. Therefore, there is a need of ensuring that the necessary support systems must be appropriate to, and dependent upon the disabled student's specific needs.

### **Parental Involvement**

One of the most important and immediate environments for every child is the family and home environment. The literature reveals a number of general beliefs and assumptions regarding the place of parents in relation to their children's schooling. Hornby (2000) states that parental involvement is

the key to the successful development of the child. Therefore, an effective educational system recognises the vital role that home, parents or guardians play in their child's learning processes, and thus, need to be involved in supporting a child's education. All parents develop expectations about their child's education based on their own experience and informal networks for parents (Russell, 2004). Parents typically expect high quality of teaching, their child's academic progress and happiness, homework, fair discipline and information (Crozier, 1999). It is reported that these expectations are even more pronounced and important in relationship to disabled students (Fraser, 2005). Goodnow and Collins (1990) suggest that parents' ideas will not automatically change as a result of receiving information about their child's 'special' educational needs. Interestingly the literature reports mixed findings regarding how parental expectations are translated in practice and as a voice in research affecting their disabled child.

Teaching staff can learn a great deal about students from the parents' perspective about how they learn and interact at home and outside of school (Overton, 2005). Collaboration to establish shared goals together with parents and guardians is essential in order to develop positive partnerships. It was suggested by Mortimer (2001) that if professionals and parents are discussing a plan for their child, professionals should "listen first, talk later, find common ground last" (p. 45). Parental involvement and open-parent school communication needs to be part and parcel of everyday school life. Jones (1998) suggests that parents need to be kept continually informed about their child's behaviour in class, particularly if the child falls behind in schoolwork. As Jones (1998) argues, it is better to deal with problems, when they first arise, than to wait, until a crisis has occurred. If parents disagree with professional opinion about their child, this may mean they change their expectations, ignore the information or change their reference group. The parents of a disabled child will react in a similar way as a result of their expectations not being confirmed (Russell 2004). Ashman (2009) reports that parents can avoid contact with the school if they see themselves as visitors who are unwelcome, if they are not offered opportunities to learn

about the school and if they have negative perceptions of the school based on their own experiences as students. Fraser (2005) reports that communication between parents and school becomes difficult when schools pay lip service to policies around parent and teacher communication or when schools do not understand or value parents and when schools treat parents as if they were impaired.

The very fact that parents play a central and powerful role as educational partners demands schools to actively listen to parents. Listening to parents and considering the perspective of parents are ways in which professionals can support the development of educational provision that is sensitive and effective and that meet the needs of disabled students. Ward et al. (2004) found parents valued being listened to, feeling that their views had been heard, and participating in discussions about future opportunities for their child. However, even today, parents are often viewed as unrealistic and not being able to accept, adjust and sometimes even to cope with their disabled child. Lake and Billingsley (2000) believed that the main causes of conflict between school and the parents of a disabled child is the discrepancy between the respective views of the child and their needs. When the school describes the child, it is often from a deficit perspective: children's needs are connected to their 'disability' and not to their 'ability'. The parents' knowledge gives a unique perspective to inclusive education as a humanising context (Ware, 1999), as opposed to inclusion in the way that Slee (2001b, p. 174) critically calls "technical problems to be solved". The approach of the social model of disability provides a better way forward. According to this approach focus is put on the child's strengths, the parent's aspirations and opportunities to achieve. This involves opportunities to share information about what they need and expect. As a result more equal relationships can be developed between the parents of the disabled child and the school. In fact Ware (1999) warns that research in inclusive education should focus on working *with* parents rather than working *on* parents.

## **Inclusion in the Maltese Context**

### **Education in Malta.**

Malta has had an extensive history in its development (for an overview please consult Appendix B) and inclusion in the Maltese context is relatively a new situation.

### **Special education in Malta.**

Special educational provision has been practiced in Malta since 1951 and is still being practised today. The Educational Act of 1974 stipulated that children of compulsory school age 'with some mental, emotional or physical handicap' should be registered and should attend a special school as the Minister of Education may direct. The education act of 1974 was revised in 1988, and gave disabled children the right to a public education further establishing education as a right (Zammit Mangion, 1992).

One of the first proposed developments in the lives of disabled individuals and their families has been the Maltese Ministry of Education's incremental phasing-in of an inclusive education policy in 1994.

## **Inclusion as Human Rights Issue in Malta**

Whilst Malta, like many other countries, recognises that inclusive education is a human rights issue, inadequate education provision has been one of the major factors contributing to the continued oppression of Maltese disabled people (Camilleri 1999, p. 846). Inclusion involves '*...the processes of increasing the participation of students in and reducing their exclusion from mainstream curricula and communities*' (Ainscow & Booth, 1998, p.2). The Warnock Report 'Special educational needs' (1978) suggests that the quality of education offered to pupils in special provision was unsatisfactory,

“particularly with respect to the curriculum opportunities provided, and many special schools underestimate their pupils’ capabilities (DES, 1978)” (Ainscow, 1999, p.18). Consequentially, schools and school systems in many countries including Malta began to review their policies and practices (Hegarty, 1990). Following two conferences held by the United Nations in the 1990s, namely the ‘education for all’ conference held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 and the UNESCO conference in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994, the concept of inclusive education gained importance. The Salamanca Statement proposes that the development of schools with an inclusive orientation is the most effective means of improving the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (Ainscow, 1999). In Malta as in many other countries The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) is being used “...to formulate strategies that will support movements towards inclusive schooling” (Ainscow, 1999, p. 147).

### **Implementation of the Warnock Report in Malta – an inclusion policy.**

The Warnock report of 1978 resulted in disabled children being integrated in mainstream schools. By 1986 there were 121 (0.2%) disabled children placed in special classes in mainstream schools compared with a figure of 0.8% of children segregated in special schools. The process of inclusive education followed a circular that was sent to all heads of state primary schools in March 1989 on Integrating Handicapped Children. This circular emphasised that handicapped or other disadvantaged children should be given every opportunity to develop their potential so that they could grow up and lead as full and satisfying lives as possible within the community. Article 23 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Student (1989) states that it is the right of disabled students to enjoy a full and decent life under conditions, which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the student’s active participation in the community. It recognises the

right of the disabled student to special care, education, health care, and training, rehabilitation, preparing for employment and recreation opportunities. All these shall be designed in a manner conducive to the student achieving “the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development”.

An inclusive educational policy was introduced in state schools in 1995. The policy promoted inclusive education in the three educational sectors. A number of documents stress this ideology, amongst them the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC, 1999), For All Students to Succeed (2005), Creating Inclusive Schools (2005), and Differentiating Instruction in the primary classroom (2005). The Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilita (KNPD) formally stated:

‘...to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are educated with students who are not disabled and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of students with disabilities from the regular educational school environment occurs only when the nature or severity of disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactory.’

### **The adoption of the “Statementing Process” in Malta.**

The year 2000 saw the adoption of the British ‘statementing’ process by the Maltese Educational System For students to receive extra support at school they have to have a psychological assessment and a school based assessment of needs, which is passed onto the Statementing Moderation Board by the school. Therefore, ‘statementing’ is the process through which the educational needs of a disabled student are identified and then met. These policies of including disabled students within mainstream education supported by the ‘statementing’ process has meant that in 2010 only 236 students attend special schools compared with 2,080 who have been ‘statemented’ and are supported by 1,545 learning support assistants in mainstream schools (Bartolo and Borg, 2009).

## **Educational “Standards” in Malta**

Education in Malta tends to focus on standards (Sultana, 1994). These standards have infiltrated all state, most church and independent schools. Assessments, appraisals and evaluative systems embody this standards-movement in schools (Chircop, 1994). Researchers have begun to consider the extent to which inclusion and academic achievement are compatible or mutually exclusive concepts (Rouse & Florian, 1997; Lunt & Norwich, 1999; Ainscow *et al.*, 2004). According to Ainscow (1994) school improvement should be seen not in terms of raising the attainments of the highest attainers in a school, but of *‘improving the quality of education for all’*. However a number of educators believe that this is not what is happening in Malta. ‘Education in Malta, in recent history, has strongly focused on standards (Sultana 1994); and this current has seeped through most primary schools. The discourse of inclusive education has been hijacked by a concern for quality.’ (Azzopardi, 2003, p. 161)

The National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) states that our society

‘...believes in the broadening of democratic boundaries, in the fostering of a participatory culture, in the defence of the basic rights of students, in the constant struggle against all those factors that prevent the students’ fruition and in the safeguarding and strengthening of our country’s achievements in the social and cultural fields.’

As asserted by Stivala (2008), society needs to start thinking seriously about practical, concrete solutions, because students are coming out of the system unprepared and are not being given a chance to accomplish their potential.

Although the history of inclusion shows that there has been a positive swing towards a more inclusive society, in reality issues related to attitudes, access, discrimination, charity and segregation are still present in society today. ‘Even though there is inclusion in the way we have encouraged disabled people to participate in everyday life and receive education on par

with the average person, are they getting the same opportunities as everybody else?’ (Stivala, 2008, p.65)

In Malta, the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000 set the rights of disabled people as part of national legislation. This states that it is illegal to discriminate against disabled people in the areas of education, employment, accessibility, the provision of goods and services, housing and accommodation, and insurance. The Act enhances the consideration of the holistic way of life. However, it is evident that disabled people have to face disabling barriers in all aspects of their life. The Equal Opportunities Act is the key to all disabled individuals to dismantle these disabling barriers. From the time it was put into action it generated awareness through making employers, educators, service providers and members of the general public aware of the rights of disabled people. Even so it is evident that such awareness still needs to become part of the social processes of inclusion. The National Commission for Persons with Disability (KNPD, 2007) states that within our local context, more than ever before, during the past twenty five years, there has been more than a strong growth in services and benefits for disabled people coupled with a substantial increase in the number of voluntary organisations. These organisations, services and benefits all have one aim, which is to improve the quality of life of disabled people.

Whilst the Ministry of Education has been investing time and money to try to develop inclusive practices within schools including the ‘Inclusive Curriculum Project’ based on Principle 1 of the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC, Ministry of Education, 2000), which states the importance of developing quality education for all students, these practices are not always inclusive and differ from those proposed by the Index of Inclusion and the UDL. The main aims of the project are to support teachers’ professional practice, to raise the standard of education for all students, to provide opportunity for disabled students attending special schools to access the subjects within the curriculum, and to support teachers in self-evaluation



techniques. Whilst we are still talking about special schools, we can never have inclusion.

### **Tradition of support**

However up to 2005, at the implementation level is that the whole issue surrounding inclusive education relies on the tradition of support (Azzopardi, 2005) and collaboration. It is a question of gaining enough support from the government, the different education authorities, the National Commission of Persons with Disability, the Malta Union of Teachers, the Church Schools Secretariat, school administrators, teachers, parents and the students. In fact, it is a question of gaining the support of society to ensure a valuable education for all students whatever abilities, needs or label they may have been given (Azzopardi, 2005).

Society needs to take a flexible but strong position on inclusive education. In order to understand prejudice and exclusion, one needs to put oneself in the shoes of others living realities much different from one's own. Society should be striving to broaden the options available to disabled people as to how to live their lives in the most enriching ways possible. Prejudice must be directly addressed in schools. Inclusion is a realistic, practical issue (Azzopardi, 2005). Inclusion stands for change and education is the very place from which change should stem.

### **Inclusion in Malta 2010 and Forward**

During the scholastic year 2010/2011 and onwards Malta's primary and secondary schools will undergo an Educational Reform, where disabled students will be present in an increasing number of classrooms, all schools will contain students with mixed ability and there will be a drive to implement more inclusive practices. Research (McCormick et al., 1997; Cooper et al.,

1999; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1999; Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999; Tanti Burlò et al., 1995; Soresi & Nota, 2007) has established that, when inclusion is practiced fully within a school, this helps to foster more positive attitudes towards disabled students. It is worth noting that while there is significant political and educational support towards inclusive education in Malta, there are still a significant number of educators who feel that inclusive education is still an ideal rather than a reality (Bartolo, 2010).

### **Inclusive education: inclusive society.**

Inclusive education is both a precursor to, and a result of, an inclusive society. Although there are many policies stating the inclusivity of our educational system, it is a system burdened by examinations and certification, the obtaining of which is strictly regulated and implemented in an exclusionary method. The National Minimum Curriculum advocates that assessment should be considered primarily as a learning tool through which learners can themselves measure their progress. This is evidence of a willingness to give students the support needed to obtain some form of certification of their capabilities; however it is a far cry from what actually happens in schools. Assessment is the tail that wags the dog and frequently schools focus on MATSEC certification for the students, regardless of how many will be without the skills necessary to obtain them. Concessions given are often insufficient and obtained only on medical and psychological reports, which often serve to exclude the student from his peers. Assessment is an exclusionary practice because of the 'one size fits all' approach. All Year 6 students attending state schools will be facing an oral examination in English and Maltese at the end of Year 6, starting in June 2011. Preparation for the new examination system started in October 2009. These oral examinations are being introduced following the removal of the Junior Lyceum examination system and its substitution by a benchmark examination, which will assess all students after they finish primary school. Students will get 60% of the marks from the reading and writing parts of the Maltese and English exam, while the

listening and speaking part will make up the other 40%. Effective inclusion requires reflective educators to examine their attitudes and differentiate their assessment to accommodate individual challenges and provide students with meaningful access to and progress in the general education curriculum (Salend, 2001). As Calleja and Borg (2006) claimed those students who encounter difficulties in the core areas of the curriculum can eventually be 'pushed out' of the system without mastering the basic skills.

Research indicates that inclusive education practices have an effect on students' relationships. A study assessing the importance of implementing a Peer Preparation Programme in Malta carried out by Tanti Burlò et al. (1995) indicated that disabled students were chosen more and rejected less by their peers, where the Peer Preparation Programme was implemented.

Effective transition programming is a crucial component in ensuring that disabled individuals receive appropriate education (Zhang, Ivester, Chen & Katsiyannis, 2005). Maltese schools tend to focus on post-secondary training and education rather than the possibilities of employment after the end of Form 5. Consequently disabled students are exiting the school system without any job training. The ultimate goal of education is to prepare students to function in their future environments. Therefore, schools should analyse the demands of these environments and organise curricula that prepare students to function as independently as possible. Schools must provide students with an array of experiences in different fields (Zhang, Ivester, Chen & Katsiyannis, 2005). All students should have the opportunity to learn school subjects with work as the context of their learning. Communities abound with work and learning opportunities, and these have the power to transform the entire curriculum. In a study by Zhang, Ivester, Chen and Katsiyannis (2005) respondents reported that postsecondary education was not viewed as appropriately addressed. This is certainly an area that needs more attention given that many disabled students are not being given the opportunity to attend post secondary education in Malta, after attending mainstream schools for their entire school journey.

## **Conclusion**

This research seeks to embrace one of the basic human rights in education, namely access to and diversity in learning, as set out, in a worldwide context, during the Salamanca Statement, Spain (April 1994), and later adopted by UNESCO (July 1994). Children, who learn together, learn to live together (National Curriculum Focus Group for Inclusive Education 2002). The study aims to evaluate the experiences of a Maltese school that decided to embrace the philosophy of inclusion, implementing a social model framework that focuses on abilities and skills rather than labelling and deficits (medical model). Specifically it addresses the following research question; 'What are the effects on the students, parents and teachers attending a school, which embraces the philosophy of inclusion?'

This literature review contributes to the study and the exploration of the reality surrounding inclusive education and more particularly to including disabled students in mainstream schools. Addressing the challenges associated with diversity and mixed ability classrooms is both multifaceted and complex. It is a learning journey for all the stakeholders, including the school community, the school management team and the teachers.

There are certain important requirements and ingredients that are necessary of an inclusive school. Firstly, there must be belief that all children can learn. Secondly, there must be the creation of learning environments, which are characterised specifically by care for the learner. Finally, there must be a form of planning that truly caters for the needs of each and every learner in the classroom. It is only 'when differentiation is understood as a process of understanding, valuing and responding to differences in how people learn that it can be a largely positive experience' (Fielding, 1996).

Whether we like it or not, as educators, we are dealing with a whole range of differences and it is only when we learn to recognise our students' strengths and listen to their individual voices that we can say we have an inclusive classroom. It may also be the answer to giving the learner his entitlement.

In the following chapter the selection of the specific methods employed in this study together with the rationale and the theoretical framework underpinning this research will be explained, all the while keeping the research question in mind. The research question aims to evaluate a whole school approach towards the inclusion of disabled pupils at a school that has been striving towards implementing a social model of disability. The challenge with researching inclusive education practices is the difference in approaches to education, at state level, both in the school and within individual classrooms. Each disabled student placed in an inclusive classroom may need different approaches to learning. This reality requires the researcher to adopt an approach that can capture the unique and multifaceted aspects of an inclusive school.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Mapping the Journey – a Peep into a School's Experience**

A fact is like a sack, which won't stand up when it is empty. In order that it may stand up, one has to put into it the reason and sentiment, which have caused it to exist.

(Luigi Pirandello, 1922: pp. 211-276)

The purpose of this research is to evaluate a whole school approach towards the inclusion of disabled students at a school, giving students and their parents an opportunity to be heard and a platform to share their views so as to promote change to offer a better educational experience for disabled students in mainstream schools. Focusing on the main research question: “What changes does the implementation of the Social Model of Disability that focuses on abilities and school population?” This research aims to explore what changes does the implementaion of the Social Model of Disability have on a school population. The following research questions came under the umbrella of the main research question and investigated:

1. The practices within the school that enable inclusion
2. The experience of disabled and non-disabled students, students’ parents, teachers, learning support assistants (LSAs) and administrators.
3. Whether or not and how disabled students are participating, active members of the school.
4. The effect of inclusion on the school community/culture.

The participants in this study had the foreknowledge that the outcome of this research would be useful both for them as well as for other families and disabled students. According to Danieli and Woodhams (2005), disability research is a process of producing knowledge that aims to be beneficial to oppressed people, and therefore must not solely occur for the researcher’s success. This is in line with the principle of *accountability* postulated by Barnes (1992, 2001 and 2003).

Research is carried out with the aim of understanding our world in a way that goes far beyond simple description, common sense or an anecdote (Pole and Lampard, 2002). In its most simple form research aims at answering questions, an acquisition of knowledge and extending our understanding of the social world (Matthews and Ross, 2010). This chapter explains in detail the methods chosen for the study. My position in working closely with disabled children and their families for twenty-five years and

following these children into primary and then secondary and post-secondary school has guided me in the selection and design of this research and throughout this journey. Always central to my thinking whilst carrying out this study, is that each family and student knows their needs, and as an educator and researcher I need to listen, to learn and respond accordingly. In this chapter, I explain why I have used a single-case study based on the interpretative paradigm following the principles of participatory disability research in part. My goal was to be guided by the following participatory design concepts: co- operation, partnership, mutual learning and respect and to include the participants in the process of the research. This aim was achieved in the following way. The school as a community wanted to evaluate their practice of inclusive education, and together we identified the research question, the goals of the research and the general strategies that were to be implemented. The values of the research partners were decided upon and this is where this research is participatory to a degree. Whilst the parent and student questionnaires, included questions that were generated and reviewed and by the parents of disabled and non-disabled students attending the school and the teachers' questionnaire was included in the research design on request by the teachers who could not take part in one of the four focus groups. The participants were also involved at the data collecting stage in the decisions taken about the logistics and planning of the data collection and the school worked together to achieve a common understanding on the goals and activities that the research planned on implementing. The emphasis at the analysis stage was on the researcher and the participants were involved at the analysis stage by reviewing and verifying the analysed data. However, all knowledge gained was linked to social and educational change for the benefit disabled and non-disabled students, teaching staff and parents. Furthermore in this chapter I discuss the research design which consisted of four stages: Stage one was to select the questions to be studied, stage two identifying data to be collected and the right tools to collect this data, stage three implementation of data collection, stage four analysing the results (Philliber, Schwab, & Samsloss, 1980).



The concept of inclusive education needs to be viewed as a process located within the cultures, policies and practices of the whole school. Within an inclusive school assisting each student achieve their 100%, we need to challenge and seek to change the values, attitudes and approaches, which prevent the student being an active and valued member of their class and school community. Given that the aim of the research is to look at the school, as well as the individual experiences of inclusive education, all stakeholders are involved as research participants. For this reason both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used using different data collecting tools. The data collecting tools were the following:

1. Questionnaires: The aim of this questionnaire is to assess parental, students' and teachers' attitudes towards the inclusive experience at the school.
2. Semi-structured interviews with administration
3. Focus groups with teacher/facilitator teams in order to elicit in-depth information.
4. Unstructured observations in playgrounds.
5. Documents related to policy and practice of the school.

As participatory methods generate both qualitative and quantitative data including the above data collecting tools, that were designed to capture perceptions and explore issues of this school's inclusive experience in detail, this again fits this research in to the participatory definition. Also participatory research tends to employ more contextual methods and elicits more qualitative and interpretive information whilst bringing about an important additional commitment of respect and ownership.

The school in this study adopts a whole school approach towards the inclusion of disabled pupils and has been striving towards implementing a social model of disability. Whilst acknowledging the medical model of disability, the methodology advocated by this model does not give the necessary importance to the societal role in its understanding of disability and the individual. Hence this research includes the viewpoints of disabled

students, their families, and the school in general. Finkelstein's (1980) interpretation of the social model within the social understanding of disability is that it neither provides a specific explanation of the concept of disability, nor puts disability and disabled people as the subject matter. The social model of disability aims to shift our focus away from disabled individuals towards the restrictive structural environments and the social, cultural, political and attitudinal barriers that act as a barrier to inclusion. The social model approach is about focusing on the social barriers within the environment, culture and economy (Barnes and Mercer 2003). In relation to the Maltese educational context the social model approach has been very useful in the local disability movement (Tanti Burlò, 2010). In fact the National Commission of Persons with Disability embraces the social model approach and has used it in the promotion of inclusion within the Maltese educational system and society at large. Although the Social model approach has been criticised (Shakespeare and Watson, 2001), in the development of inclusive schools in Malta it is still relevant, and its inception is viewed as a great move towards inclusion, particularly in the local context.

As mentioned above both quantitative and qualitative methodology is being used to conduct this study as advocated as an approach to knowing the social world (Cresswell, 2003). Using mixed methods with stakeholders was chosen as the most suitable approach for this study, as it enables the researcher to understand the meaning that people attach to everyday life (Fouché & Delport, 2002). The idea originated from reflective practice based on readings and teachings of Mara Sapon-Shevin (1992a; 1992b; 1992c; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2007) together with the social model of disability. In fact, the focus is on the experiences of all the school community and the meaning of these experiences. This encouraged the use of mixed methods of inquiry in order to substantiate the following questions that are asked of any empirical study: What are the findings, how were they obtained, in what way are they believable, and in what ways do they matter? Developing my research from an inclusive perspective of education, I focused on the importance of building relationships within the college being studied, in which

the researcher has to become a member who is trusted, while creating a level of reflective understanding (Mayall, 2000) of the salient issues that surround the social relationships based on trust and respect. 'The researcher participates in the struggle of the people... The researcher works with the community to help turn its felt but unarticulated problem into an identifiable topic of collective investigation' (Park, 1993, p. 9).

My aim in this research is to impact the participants on a personal level, through empowerment and by having the opportunity for self-representation and, on a social level, through social and historical awareness of lived inclusive practices, making lives visible and the understanding that others can be enriched.

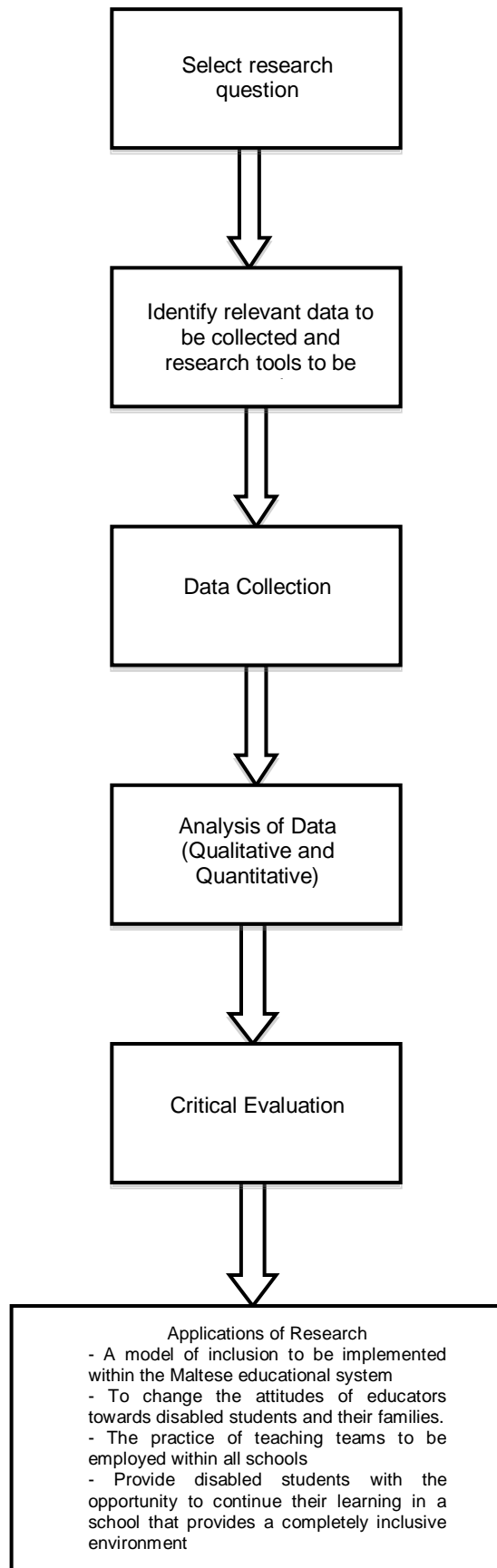


Figure 2. Main features of research design

In the most elementary sense, the research design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions (Yin, 2009; see figure 2).

In this research design I present the methodological issues of the thesis. It presents the units of analysis, it covers the reasons for selecting the school, it describes the data sources that were used, how the data was collected and how the data was analysed. It is presented in such a way that other researchers can replicate this research (Yin, 2009).

## **Philosophical Framework**

Weber has proposed that values cannot be eliminated from research (Root, 1993). What researchers choose to investigate is influenced by the very values they want to promote and believe in (Clifford, 2005). Working in the field of disability has helped me reflect on the inclusive experience and the importance we need to give to all the stakeholders. My contact with families, whilst working with their disabled children, has also helped me develop a deep respect for the disabled individuals and their families and has given me an insight into how important it is to listen to their lived experience and get an insight of their perspective in order to support them and others to improve their quality of life. My basic values and the very fact that the children I had followed from birth and whose parents I had encouraged to place their child into mainstream schools, coupled with their disappointments, made me return to the school environment. The fundamental concepts of self-worthiness, social acceptance, educational equality, education for life and employment made me want to try and make changes to schools so that disabled students' experiences would be less of an attempt at integration but a positive learning experience founded on the above concepts.

Taking equality in education and trying to rationalize it has proved difficult, and here I found the capability approach useful. In *Commodities and*

*Capabilities*, Sen (1985) advocates to focus on an individual's capability to function, that is what the person can do or can be in leading a life that he chooses. The focus is on what can be achieved by the disabled student that is his capabilities. Sen's framework is useful to analyze and understand disability in terms of a capability or a deprivation in education, which ties in with the social model of disability thinking where disabled people are said to face discrimination and segregation through sensory, attitudinal, cognitive, physical and economic barriers (Hahn, 2002). Within this approach, capability does not constitute the presence of impairment, whether physical or intellectual; rather it is understood as a *practical opportunity*. *Functioning* is the actual achievement of the person, what he actually achieves through being or doing. According to Sen (1992), equality should be sought primarily in the space of capability. The capability approach focuses on the personal well-being of a person and quality of life issues. He talks about being educated as a basic capability. It is so because without an education a person is being considerably disadvantaged, and since education plays a substantial role in the development of other capabilities and a disabled student's future outcomes, it is therefore the building block for other capabilities and is fundamental to a disabled student's well-being, both present and future.

Promoting the concept of a school for all provides an important foundation for ensuring equality of opportunity for all learners in every aspect of their lives, including education, vocational training, employment and social life. Opportunities also include educational resources (human resources and physical resources), the school building and policy, practice, and school rules and regulations. The capability framework looks at the interaction between the individual characteristics of a student and the design and the social and physical environment of the school. This aspect of opportunity within the capability approach points out what we are equalizing, and stresses what we are not trying to equalize. Are we equalizing the effective access to the disabled student accessing the curriculum and being part of the learning, as opposed to a one-size fits all approach to education? Fundamental to the

provision of educational entitlements for the disabled student is that they have to meet the criteria of both equity and social justice. The capability approach provides us with both a framework for the provision of educational learning entitlement that should be guaranteed to the disabled student and provides a normative framework for the assessment of inequalities (Sen, 1999). At the same time we are taking the disabled student's impairments into consideration by removing the necessary barriers that are restricting learning for that individual and making available all the necessary resources and opportunities for him to achieve fundamental educational capabilities that he needs to participate both at school and in the wider community. This also provides an answer to the question of fairness in the provisions of resources and, more especially, in the giving of examination concessions, which teachers and examination boards often find a very difficult area here in Malta. It also links in with the application of research found in Figure 2 in providing disabled students with the opportunity to continue their learning in a school that provides a completely inclusive environment.

This principle of providing an education that deals with the true injustice of disabled students, namely social exclusion and discrimination, was stressed by Meijer (2010) when he argued that inclusive education is

... in principle of a normative nature and not necessarily subject to scientific proof... For me, the discussion about the relevance and necessity of social cohesion as well as inclusive education and the influence of inclusive education on social cohesion are purely normative issues. And we should keep them there! (Meijer 2010, p. 8)

Trying to put this into practice led to the research question and to the choice of methodology, in order to be able to evaluate and establish empathetic understanding of the experience of a whole school community committed to the concept of inclusive education.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The methodology used for this study is based on the tradition of the naturalistic and empirical constructs of the social sciences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate naturalistic and empirical enquiry as being particularly suited to real life research and complementary with case study research, sharing many characteristics.

It follows the principles of the interpretative approach, which plays a two part role in educational research. Firstly, as a way of deriving meaning and critiquing the cultures, policies and practices in education, and, secondly, in the application of the research. Mercer (2002) and Lee (1991) state this approach is associated with phenomenology and ethnography, which emphasizes the importance of understanding one's own experience. It stresses the difference between the natural and the social sciences, and replaces notions such as internal and external validity with trustworthiness and authenticity. An interpretative approach supports the social construction of reality whilst placing particular emphasis on everyday experiences and understanding. Lincoln and Guba (2005) define authenticity as the production of knowledge through interaction between the researcher and the informant. Establishing authenticity in this research in a way in which ownership of this school and the researcher's journey of inclusive education is experienced and expressed, is addressed in an effort to pursue the utopian for all the stakeholders. I discussed emergent issues and themes with the participants and they also shared opinions about the school with the researcher; thus the researcher's "voice" was that of a "passionate participant" and not of a "disinterested scientist" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 166). As an educational researcher I needed to ensure that the research would benefit in developing a knowledge base that is underpinned by ethical concepts. All these elements therefore state that this approach follows an inductive rather than a deductive approach. No hypothesis is tested but, rather it allows the whole school to produce, generate, and validate meanings



about their experiences of inclusive education, whilst I aim to use this paradigm to interpret their experiences.

The interpretive paradigm believes in the participants and stresses the importance of the interaction with the researcher enabling different perspectives to be explored. This approach opposes the positivist paradigm that believes that one can describe events and get it right immediately. According to Willig (2001), a positivist researcher aims to develop objective knowledge that is '*impartial and unbiased*' (p. 3). Today this approach is not readily accepted because in reality objectivity is not easy to achieve and, due to the fact that I am actively involved in the school, I am not independent of their inclusive experience and therefore cannot claim not to have had an impact on the data.

This study is also grounded on the participatory paradigm, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach and a case study strategy. All three will be discussed below.

### **To Protect, to Include, or to Liberate?**

Current research ethics is rightly concerned about the most vulnerable groups that are being subjected to being researched and, most certainly, disabled students, their families and non-disabled students form part of these groups. This presents a real challenge in itself because, while we need to be aware of the struggle of marginal voices to be included in research and beyond, however the question I pose: is that sufficient?

The social model of disability has supported basic principles to disability research, arguing that it is research "with" disabled people rather than "about" disabled people. Research "on" or "about" disabled people promotes disabilist discourse, is disrespectful and does little to reduce labelling, barriers and segregation.

*Participatory research* calls for the inclusion of all people in the research process, which ensures the inclusion and participation of disabled people. In fact, Barton (1995) argues that the research in itself needs to achieve an inclusive society by removing all discriminatory barriers, and thus the researched are to be included in the actual research being carried out. Therefore, participatory research focuses on research “with” disabled people such that their needs and concerns are shared, studied and presented to the community with a view to do something about the issues and concerns raised. Are the concerns solely those of disabled students and their families, or also my own as a researcher?

The concerns can be threefold and overlapping. On the one hand there is the family’s concern for the individual disabled person and his personal needs according to his particular age group. On the other hand there is the concern for the family’s needs and the adjustments the family has to make to adapt to the individual disabled person’s needs. Overall, there are the researcher’s concerns which arise out of the experience through working with disabled persons and their families. Therefore there is a set of collective and general concerns which are common to the various disabled persons and their families which can beat the base of the research.

The question that remains to be answered is: are we meant to protect, to include or to liberate? If we include, we do not need to protect and at the same time we are liberating. This liberty is, primarily, both for the disabled persons and for their families; however, it can be extended to their immediate friends, colleagues and acquaintances and, in the future, the whole society at large. Therefore, following this principle of inclusion to its utmost degree, the disabled students and their families were involved to participate actively in this research, knowing its purpose and encouraged to give their input during the research process. Hunt and Goezt (1997, p. 25) argue that

The potential for participants to actively contribute to understanding of inclusion practices is great, particularly given the multiple stakeholders who are involved; indeed, participatory research methods may redefine both the research questions that are asked and the traditional role of the researcher...

In order to follow a participatory approach to the research, the disabled students as well as their parents were given a voice in both the designing and the execution of the research tools. The design of the research tools involved developing a first draft carried out by the researcher. This draft was openly discussed with the disabled students and their parents such that through their participation the research tools were amended according to the suggestions and comments of both the disabled students as well as their parents. Student questionnaires, both primary and secondary, were pre-tested with the disabled students themselves to ensure their access to the data collecting tool. As a researcher I shared my knowledge and skills with the participants throughout the research process by discussing my reflections with them and taking their feedback into account. For example, the research findings from the primary school students' questionnaires were discussed in a students forum using alternative forms and a visual mode of communication. Their feedback indicated comprehension and appreciation at being included in the research.

This case study, therefore, ensured the full participation of the disabled students and their families' voices, as well as that of other stakeholders. All the participants' views are taken into account and form an integral part of the research, such that the participants participated fully in the actualisation of this research work. It can be concluded at this point that this research work is following the participatory research approach.

However, there are other elements to this study that need to be given their due consideration, especially the *emancipatory paradigm*, which will now be discussed.

The *emancipatory paradigm* began to have an impact on research practice in the early 1990s (Walmsely, 2001).

Emancipatory research is about the demystification of the structures and processes which create disability, and the establishment of a workable dialogue between the research community and disabled people. To do this researchers must put their knowledge and skills at the disposal of disabled people. They do not have to have impairments themselves to do this. (Barnes, 1992, p. 122)

Barnes and Mercer (1997) maintain that emancipatory research is “enabling, reflexive and self-critical.” Barnes also proposes the following three core principles of emancipatory research: openness, participation, and accountability (1992, 2001, and 2003).

Emancipatory research is *enabling* since the research subject is asked to take an active part in the research such that there is an equality between the researcher and the research subject. Therefore there is *openness* and *participation* such that the research work becomes a process and an outcome as the service users and carers are encouraged to be engaged with the research process and have their say in the development of the research tools and control the process and outcome of the work. Oliver (1996) maintains that the research subjects are empowered through a reciprocal relationship with the researcher and the research carried out, such that the participants of the research direct the research to the extent that the design of the research and the outcome are created by the participants and are solely at their service. I selected and made accessible, where possible, the research tools, namely the questionnaires, the student observation checklists, and the teacher attitude questionnaire. I followed and remained faithful to the participants’ suggestions, especially listening to the views of the parents of disabled students, and to the disabled students themselves.

Whilst being aware that this research does not fulfil the criteria of emancipatory research, it does however aim to embrace the philosophy and ethos of this research paradigm.

*Reflexivity* has been adopted throughout the research process. Reflexivity is about ‘reflecting critically on the self as a researcher’ (Denzin

and Lincoln, 2005, p. 210). Lincoln also defines reflexivity as a ‘conscious experiencing of the self within the research itself’ (p. 210). Therefore, in inclusive education research it is important to question oneself and understand one’s own biases. Throughout the research, I was conscious of my position as a fervent promoter of inclusion and, with this consideration in mind, I recognized that the concept of inclusion is fraught with tensions, hesitations and contradictions, and I was constantly challenged to raise questions around who and what I am, and what difference my position made in this research. I acknowledge there is no universal truth, but we move in circles which are based on interpretations and subjectivity; everyone has his own truth. Things do not happen in a vacuum nor without a context, and knowledge is produced in a relationship where both the researcher and the institutional and discursive conditions are central. Taylor (2001a, 12, 16-17) argues that “any account of a social phenomenon or situation inevitably reflects the observer/researcher’s partial understanding and special interest”. I subscribe to Taylor’s argument on the reflexivity of the research, namely that “the researcher acts on the world and the world acts on the researcher, in a loop.” Viewing the world from no position at all is just not achievable (Burr 1995). Throughout this research I, together with the participants, have aimed at understanding and evaluating the school experience of inclusion, the experiences and feelings of the parents, students, and teachers, keeping in mind that any knowledge obtained is partial and situated as well as related to my world views and value system as an educator and researcher (Taylor 2001b), always keeping in mind the necessity to promote beneficial change.

This research work is therefore described at this stage as following, partially or wholly, two paradigms rooted in the social model of disability, mainly *the participatory paradigm* and *three principles pertaining to the emancipatory paradigm: equality (or openness and participation), reflexivity (self-criticism) and beneficency (or accountability)*.

The approach and strategy which are used in this study are now the next to be discussed.

## **A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach**

This study will evaluate the experience of all stakeholders in a Maltese school that decided to embrace the philosophy of inclusion. Qualitative research seeks to study subjects in their natural context, trying to understand the subjects' perceptions of reality around them – sometimes termed phenomenological reality (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1993). The fundamental orientation of this study is pedagogic, involving the investigation of the meaning of the experiences of students, parents, educators and administrators within this school community. Therefore, when questions are raised, data gathered, phenomena described, and textual interpretations constructed, this is done in a pedagogic style. Pedagogy requires both a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experiences and a hermeneutic ability to interpret the phenomena.

The phenomenological method consists of the art of being sensitive to language, and as language is the only way that we can bring pedagogic experience into a symbolic form, of creating a conversational relationship. The researcher must be a true listener able to listen to the subtle undertones of language. To become *au fait* with the world of schools, one has to listen to the language of teachers, parents, and students in order to understand the meaning of their world and, therefore, their subjectivity. Phenomenological research requires a high level of reflectivity together with being attuned to the lived experience.

This research is based on a case study. Yin (2009) recommended the use of case study protocol as part of a carefully designed research project that would include the following sections: an overview of the project, field procedures, and specific questions that the researcher must keep in mind during the data collection. The strategies that have been used are discussed herein, outlining both advantages and disadvantages.

The study consists of a single case study of a Maltese church school that decided to embrace the philosophy of inclusion. According to Rubin and

Babbie (2001), a case study is '*an idiographic examination of a single individual, family, group, organisation, community or society*'. This school takes boys aged five to sixteen. Over the last fifteen years this school has moved from mainstreaming to inclusion. Research studies (e.g. Villa, Thousand, Meyers and Nevin 1996; Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank and Smith 2004; Jupp 1992) indicate that the inclusive experience is by far the best experience school children can have, both from a social and from an academic point of view.

The multiple strategies that have been used are discussed, outlining both advantages and disadvantages. The case study includes a structured survey of a large number of parents, students and teachers in the form of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and observations held at school. The surveys lead to quantitative information about attitudes and experiences, whereas the interviews, focus groups, observations and documentaries lead to qualitative information. These will be described in more detail in the section Data Collection Tools and Data Collection below.

### **The Case Study as a Research Strategy**

I chose to use case study as the main agent for this research as it offers a qualitative dimension providing a wealth of information and ideas about context and process. This case study poses the possibility of looking into the specific attempts by disabled students, their parents, peers and teachers to be accommodated and seen as equal (Pfeiffer, 1993).

In this research Yin's (2009) definition of a case study and Merriam's (1998) definition of a qualitative case study are integrated. Yin defines the case study as:

1. An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within it's real life context

2. The case study inquiry:

- Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge into triangulation
- Benefits from the prior development of theoretical proposition to guide data collection and analysis (p.13).

For Merriam (1988), the qualitative case study is '*an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon*' (p. xiv). Merriam (1998) prescribes four characteristics to underpin a qualitative case study:

1. Particularistic: The focus of this case study is to evaluate a whole school approach to inclusive education.
2. Descriptive: The research in question will provide a rich, thick descriptive (Geertz, 1973) study of the context.
3. Heuristic: The case study is aimed at providing the reader with a clear understanding of the school and its journey towards including disabled students.
4. Inductive: To construct an interpretation of the social model approach to inclusion as a whole school policy.

Moreover, Zonabend (1992) stated that a case study is performed by giving special attention to completeness in observation, reconstruction and analysis of the case under study. Case study research is done in a way that it incorporates the views of the 'actors' in the case being studied. This view is followed in this schools unique inclusive educational journey in Malta.

There are several examples of the use of case methodology in the literature. Yin (2009) listed several examples, along with the appropriate design in each case. Case studies have been increasingly used in the field of education. The quintessential characteristics of case studies are that they



strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of actions (Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg, 1991).

Case studies provide examples of real people in real situations. While investigating events and relationships, one can establish why certain behaviour occurs. Focus can be on a single subject or on a small group. Through this case study one can get insights on similar subjects and situations, thereby assisting interpretations of similar cases. Data is collected about the subjects' present state, past experiences and their relations.

Case studies are rich in the depth, complexity, and quantity of information typically obtained. This also creates a limitation, however, because case studies usually describe only one or, at most, a few subjects such as those in a family (Gelfand, Jenson and Drew, 1997, p. 64).

The strengths of case study research are that it can give a holistic picture, which is real to read, describing reality. It can accommodate multiple sources of evidence and can be flexible in accommodating changes of direction. Complex social situations and processes can be explored enabling participants to reflect on their understanding of the processes involved, thereby supporting reflection.

A limitation of case study research is that they are personal and subjective, and cannot be easily replicated. Moreover, results cannot always be generalised, as they rely on one or few subjects or a group in a particular context. According to Bassey (1981, p. 85), reliability is more important than the ability to generalize. He considers that if case studies

are carried out systematically and critically, if they are aimed at the improvement of education, if they are relatable, and if by publication of the findings they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of educational research (p. 86).

Researchers' biases may affect outcome, and data collected from informants may be incorrect due to differently perceived perceptions. Triangulation of both sources and data collection helps in eliminating personal biases (Flick, 2009, p. 225).

I believe that adopting a case study approach was the correct choice of method for this research. It allowed me to take a holistic approach to the study of this school's inclusive educational experience, and it provided for the exploration of the different perspectives from the various stakeholders and then review and understand the findings as a whole. It also allowed me to reflect and to evaluate established practices, whilst the different sources of evidence enabled me to understand the various interactive processes around the school's inclusion of disabled students.

### **Triangulation of Data**

Triangulation of both sources and data collection helps in eliminating personal biases (Flick, 2009, p.225). Triangulation refers to the mixing of data or methods (Yin, 2009) and Case Study research is known as a triangulated research strategy. Triangulation according to Snow and Anderson (cited in Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991) can occur with data, investigators, theories and even methodologies. It was essential that whilst studying inclusive school practices, the methods had to be also inclusive and representative. I believe that data triangulation helps one to gain a better understanding of the school being studied, resulting in a clearer picture of the experience of the participants. "By taking different perspectives and using different methods we get the possibility of greater understanding of the topic" (Landridge 2004, p. 256).

In view of all of the above, this research work is being described as follows: a study embedded in the social model of disability using the Single Case *Study*, the Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach and following

the *participatory paradigm* as well as the *three principles* pertaining to the *emancipatory paradigm*.

## **Setting**

I selected the school under study for a number of reasons. Firstly, the administration expressed an interest in teacher and school development for improving learning and participation for all students. Sapon-Shevin (2007) indicates that the aim of schools should be to create classrooms in which all students see themselves reflected. The main aim of this school is to educate all students, including disabled students, validated by the curriculum, attitudes and classroom practices. Secondly, I thought that this was possibly achievable due to the fact that the school thinks in terms of inclusive education as its underlying philosophy. This is emphasized by bringing together diverse students, their families and educators to create a school experience based on acceptance, belonging and community. Thirdly, the school follows a trans-disciplinary philosophy (Giangreco, 2002; Giangreco, Cloninger and Iverson, 1998; Orkwis and McLane, 1998; Orelove, 1994) where all members of the team commit themselves to teach and work across disciplinary boundaries to provide integrated services for the students.

Inclusion is given credit, because school is the only place where students are prepared to become contributing members of society by helping students to foster academic, social-emotional, behavioural and physical development (Salend, 2008). The school experience that is offered to all the students is mainly person centred, because the college places every single student at the centre by highlighting and accepting his strengths, needs, challenges and entitlements (Tomlinson, 2003).

Also, the school claims that its educational experience is in line with the fundamental principles of inclusion. All learners are placed together in the same classes with an equal access to the curriculum and provided with accommodations, adaptations and differentiated instruction where necessary. Effective inclusion of disabled students requires reflective practices and

differentiated instruction. Classroom management practices induce possibilities for accommodating each individual need. Educators in the inclusive environment are flexible and aware of the students' needs (Conderman & Morin, 2004). Through this all students can be individually included in class by simply differentiating the curriculum instruction and the teaching approach. This in turn would demonstrate that a school promotes acceptance and supports students to achieve personal fulfilment. Effective inclusion demands educators in schools to provide all learners with an equal access by placing them all together in a mainstream community (Roach, Salisbury, & McGregor, 2002).

### **The Participants**

The participants in this study are representative of the whole school environment and I felt that they are in the best position to provide information about their experience of inclusive education. Therefore, the participants are disabled and non-students five and sixteen years of age, parents/carers, teachers, learning support assistants and administration personnel.

The students are all boys, since the school is an all boys school. The students come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and from different locations from all areas in Malta. The students and their families are in the majority Maltese; their first language is Maltese and their second language is English. English is the preferred language of the school. The students also vary in abilities, this being a school that has a policy to include all types of students irrespective of ability and or disability. The parents/carers have one area of commonality, and that accounts for their decision to send their son to this particular school. The teachers are mainly graduates from The University of Malta. The learning support assistants employed at this school all have or are undergoing the Diploma course in Facilitated Education at The University of Malta. A good percentage of them

have a first degree in psychology. The administration team is made up of three assistant heads from the Junior School and three assistant heads from the Senior School, together with the Heads of the Junior and Senior School. To be a part of the administration team of the school one has to have ten years teaching experience, five of which at the school. To be a head of school the above applies, but one also has to have, at the very minimum, the Diploma of Administration in Education.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The concept of inclusive education needs to be viewed as a process located within the cultures, policies and practices of the whole school. According to Mertens (2009), an evaluation of a service should involve the participation of stakeholders. Given that the aim of this research is to look at the school as well as the individual experiences of inclusive education, all stakeholders are involved as research participants. For this reason, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, employing different data collecting tools.

Yin (2003) identifies six sources of evidence that can be collected during case studies, each having their strengths and weaknesses. The first is documentation, which is stable, because it can be reviewed repeatedly, it is unobtrusive, it is exact and it has a broad coverage. The second is archival records, which is the same as documentation, but in addition it also has the advantage of being precise and quantitative, and the disadvantage of being difficult to access due to privacy reasons. The third is interviews; interviews are targeted and insightful, but also have disadvantages, because they can be biased due to poorly constructed questions or poor responses, and they can be inaccurate due to poor recall. The fourth are direct observations, which have the advantage of being real-time and contextual, but they can be time consuming, selective; the observed event may react differently due to the observation, and is time consuming. The fifth is

participant observation, which has the same characteristics as direct observations. They have an extra advantage as being insightful into interpersonal behaviour and an extra disadvantage because of the possibility of being biased due to manipulation. The sixth and last source of evidence is physical artefacts. These are insightful into cultural features and technical operations; however, selectivity and availability are disadvantages.

The data collecting tools will be the following, as already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter:

1. Questionnaires: aiming to assess parental, students' and teachers' attitudes towards the inclusive experience at the school
2. Semi-structured interviews with administration
3. Focus groups with teacher/facilitator teams in order to elicit in-depth information about school practices
4. Unstructured observations in playground
5. Documentation related to school policy.

### **Questionnaires.**

The questionnaires as a research tool in this case study were designed to discover the different opinions, attitudes, views, beliefs, perceptions and experiences that students and parents hold regarding their experience in their respective roles within the school. Russell and Roberts (2001) state that putting together a good questionnaire takes time, as *'abstract concepts have to be translated into concrete questions'* which can later be analysed (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000, p.999). As discussed above, the questionnaires were designed with the help of the participants and were pretested. In this study I used questionnaires addressed to three different stakeholders, namely parents, students and teachers. I chose questionnaires for the students and parents to be able to include as many of the stakeholders as possible. The open-ended questions were designed to provide for further rich data. The teachers' questionnaires were a result of

teachers not included in the focus groups expressing a desire to take part in this research.

The first questionnaire was made available to all parents who attended parents' days. The objective of the parents' questionnaire was to explore their understanding and experiences of inclusive education. The questionnaires given to the parents of disabled students had an additional section gathering data on their experiences of their son being included in this school (see Appendix D). Parents were free to decide whether or not to answer. Also, as stated in Deobold (1979), closed questions are easier to manage, but they limit the participant's response; thus the questionnaires for the parents also included open-ended questions. The questionnaire was given out to parents by hand during parents' day.

The second questionnaire was administered to students, and again the aim of this questionnaire was to explore the pupil's experience to date of their school life. Students were told that the questionnaire was not compulsory, and they were free to choose whether or not to answer it. Primary school students were given a more pictorial version to increase access (see Appendix E).

The third questionnaire was given to all teachers who were informed about the aim of the questioner's research project. This was aimed at exploring teachers' attitudes and practice of inclusion, and was only close ended keeping in mind busy teachers and the fact that some of them were taking part in a focus group. In order for teachers not to feel coerced into answering, the questionnaires were left in the different staffrooms (see Appendix G).

The questionnaires devised also included some factual questions aimed to provide supplementary evidence to the inclusion debate. For example, question 3 (Parents Questionnaire) was meant to collect data on whether or not parents thought it was a good idea to place disabled students in this school in the first place. To make the questionnaires more interesting

and varied I used both open and close ended types of questions (Walonick, 1993). The language used in all the questionnaires was kept clear, concise and jargon free (Breakwell, 2000).

The advantages found in using questionnaires as one of the main data collecting tools was the fact that they were particularly useful for gathering factual data, people's opinions, ideas, attitudes, knowledge and experiences. The questionnaires enabled the researcher to gather data from the different stakeholders, whilst making the research more available to all, and were designed to be completed easily in a variety of situations. The questionnaires were anonymous, and this assured parents, students and teachers that they could respond freely.

Although the questionnaire, as a data collecting tool, has many advantages, it also has disadvantages due to the fact that the researcher has only limited access to in-depth experiences and feelings. Also, questionnaires place a limitation on the amount of opportunities for respondents to answer questions in their own way. Although the researcher was careful about making the questionnaires inclusive to all participants, some parents may have been excluded; for example, if they did not attend parents' day, where were these questionnaires made available.

### **Semi-structured Interviews.**

Interviewing is very effective since it is a rich source for providing quality data. It is a means through which the interviewee has the opportunity to express ideas and opinions. The interviewer has the occasion to gather, not just what is being said but even what is not (Anderson, 1990). The interview is another tool adopted by the researcher as one of the most important sources of case study information and requires him to establish good relationships through these interviews. *'A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings'* (Bell, 1999).



Useful information can be gained from non-verbal cues like voice tone and facial expressions. Interviews gave the administration a chance to voice its observations, opinions, concerns and desires (Thomas Bernard, 2000) about the practice and challenges faced in their day to day running and the supporting roles administrators play in an inclusive school.

A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix H) consisting of open and closed ended questions was used with two key members of the school administration and was carried out on the school premises. Semi-structured interviews are considered as a flexible method that enables researchers to collect detailed conversational data for analysis (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Langdridge, 2004). Moser & Kalton (1979) argue that they offer the advantage of balancing the complications that might be arise from an open ended interview and the limitation of contextual understanding caused by the rigidity of a structured interview. Moreover, it helps to reduce interpersonal bias, because it uses a standardised interview schedule with pre-set questions. However, the interviewer is not constrained to rely on the rigorous application of the schedule. On the other hand, respondents are not constrained by fixed answers (Langdridge, 2004). Despite these advantages, semi-structured interviews also have disadvantages that may affect data collection. Disadvantages can include gathering incorrect information by inappropriate prompts and wrong question sequences. Interviewers must be aware of biased responses and be able to deal with 'problem respondents'. Also, generalisation is often limited when in-depth data is sought (Cohen, Mansion & Morrison, 2000).

Table 1

Experience of Heads of School

	Background
Head of Junior School	15 years as a primary school teacher, 5 years as an Assistant Head and 8 years as Head of School
Head of Senior School	12 years teaching experience + 6 years Asst Head + 3 years Head of Secondary school

## Focus Groups.

Focus groups was the method used with the teaching teams to obtain their perceptions on their experience of implementing inclusion in practice. The use of focus groups is growing in educational research because of its advantage of forming groups that provide highest quality discussions of the research topic (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The data emerges from the exchange of ideas and interaction among the members of the group. This may lead to disclosure of relevant information with the possibility of probing to gain further data. Open-ended questions are also used in focus groups in order to generate qualitative data regarding views, attitudes, perceptions and opinions. However, some participants may be reluctant to voice negative issues due to the presence of group norms. Additionally, the presence of other research participants may compromise confidentiality of the interview, thus creating social desirability bias (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005), that is the tendency of respondents to reply in a manner that will be viewed favourably by others (Fisher, 1993).

In this research study, four focus groups were held, as indicated below (for guidelines see Appendix I), and the focus group participants shared knowledge and experience in the subject-matter. Three of out of the four focus group discussions were audio taped with the participants' consent. One of the focus groups was not audio recorded, because two participants in the group asked for the recorder not to be used.

Table 2  
Members of Focus Groups

	Background
Teaching Team 1	4 Form V year Form teachers, 5 Form V subject LSAs, Form V Assistant Head – all with 5+ years teaching experience within the college
Teaching Team 2	4 Form 3 Class teachers, 4 Form 3 subject facilitators, Year Coordinator, the Assistant Head of Forms III and IV, all having 5+ years teaching experience within the college
Teaching Team 3	4 Form 1 year class teachers, 5 Form 1 subject Facilitators, the Assistant Head of Form 1 and 2 all with 3+ years teaching experience within the college

Teaching Team 4	Assistant Head Primary School, Grade One Teacher and 2 Grade One Class LSAs, Grade 5 Teacher and 2 Grade 5 Class LSAs Grade 6 English Subject Teacher, Grade 6 English Subject LSA, Grade 6 Math Subject Teacher and Grade 6 Maltese Subject Teacher
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### **Observations.**

This particular study involves participant observations aimed to study the disabled students' inclusion with their peers in the playground. Observations reveal the characteristics of the individuals being observed and have the potential to do so in a way no other means can disclose. It will be of great interest to this researcher to discover whether people do what they say they do and behave in the way they purport to (Bell, 1996). Two disabled students to be observed were selected from early, middle and senior school. These observations took place during break, which is a free for all, and although breaks are supervised there is little adult interaction except when there is a need for correction. The same students were observed three times, as I felt one is more likely to observe samples of true behaviour over periodic observations.

Observation studies are superior to experiments and surveys when data is being collected on non-verbal behaviour. In the observation study, the investigator is able to discern ongoing behaviour as it occurs and is able to make appropriate notes about its salient features. Due to the fact that case study observations take place over an extended period of time, the researcher can develop a more intimate and informal relationship with those he is observing, generally in more natural environments than those in which experiments and surveys are conducted. (Bailey as cited in Cohen and Manion, 1992, p.107)

Observation limitations include the possibility of invading privacy. Familiarisation as well as the general process may be slow. I created the checklist (Appendix J) based on the literature review and the results of the pilot study which will be discussed below.

## **Documentation.**

The documents analysed within this case study are policy statements, mission statements and Magil Action Planning session (MAPs) and individual educational evaluations and outside evaluation reports. The aim of these documents is to provide the formal framework to support and relate to the formal and informal reality of the school being studied. Documents, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), refer to '*any written or recorded material other than a record that was not prepared specifically in response to a request from the inquirer*' (p. 277). Goetz and LeCompte (1984) use the term artefacts to refer to '*the range of written and symbolic records kept by or on participants in a social group*' (p. 153). The researcher looked for documents and artefacts that were relevant to the role of inclusion and therefore could contribute to answering the research questions (Merriam, 1988). The content analysis of this '*mute evidence*' (Hodder, 1998, p. 110) helped in the triangulation of data collected from conducting interviews and carrying out observations (Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995).

I used qualitative content analysis to analyze the documents. '*Essentially content analysis is a systematic procedure for describing the content of communication*' (Merriam, 1988, p. 116). Qualitative content analysis targets an understanding of the meaning in the document, reflecting upon it, looking for subtle differences in meanings, and looking for relationships between situations (Altheide, 1987; Fehring, 1999). The research purpose and questions guided the content analysis.

By employing the four data collecting tools I could arrive at a '*holistic interpretation*' (Merriam, 1988, p. 102) of the experience of inclusion, including the beliefs and practices of all the stakeholders. This data will be corroborated by documentation, namely an evaluation by parents, students and teachers of MAPS, which will be referred to in the analysis. Outside verification was sought through the use of university students' observations. These students would have read study units on inclusion during their second year and would be well versed in principles and theories of inclusion. As

third year students they then have the opportunity to choose an elective practicum in one of four areas: clinical, counselling, educational or organisational. Undergraduate third year psychology students choosing to read a practicum in the educational area would need to carry out fifty hours observation at a school, keep a log book and write a critique based on their observation and the literature on inclusion. Permission from the practicum tutor and from the students was sought to make use of the write-ups. The fact that they were students gave me the opportunity to see views of someone who has had experience of inclusion at a theoretical more than at a practical level and was seeing its implementation in school for the first time. This allowed me to capture the 'awe' experience of first-timers, be they positive or negative.

The documents selected below were chosen because they were considered pertinent to inclusive planning and evidence that inclusion was practiced within a school.

### **MAPs**

MAPs (O'Brien and Forest, 1989) is a process that brings together students, school staff and family members in order to create a shared understanding of the disabled student. A student's strengths and needs are clearly identified and, based on this shared understanding, the team negotiate modifications to school, family and individual routines. MAPs is both a planning and an evaluation tool, and is closely linked to creating and sustaining circles of support for the disabled students, their families and the teaching team.

### **IEP**

An IEP is a formal written document for a disabled student who is eligible for extra in-school/class support, in Malta determined by the

Statementing Board. When a disabled student is placed in a mainstream setting, the IEP will contain modifications needed, including curriculum, instructional procedures, staffing, classroom organisation and adaptive equipment, materials or aides.

An IEP has the following components:

- The student's current level of academic achievement and functional performance
- Statements of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals
- Statement of short term objectives for students who take alternative assessments
- Statement of special and related services
- Statement of any individual modifications in assessment procedures
- Statement of why a student cannot participate in mainstream assessments
- Statement of transition services for all students aged 16 years
- Statement of how annual goals will be measured, how parents will be informed, and how progress will be monitored

### **Reliability and Validity**

Validity and reliability are important factors explored when adopting both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Cho and Trent, 2006). In the case of quantitative research following the procedures established in this methodology enhanced reliability in this study. In the case of qualitative research the terms trustworthiness and authenticity are used (Roberts, 2006). The interpretative researcher believes in trustworthiness and authenticity, which are equivalent to validity and reliability employed in scientific research. Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the results can be repeated in different circumstances, and authenticity evaluates the

effectiveness of the tools used to measure the phenomena being studied, as well as being designed to provide accountability for all the participants to benefit from their involvement in the study. According to Roberts (2006), a researcher should make use of verification procedures, thus making the study trustworthy. The verification procedures are peer review, prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, external audit, reflexivity and thick description (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). As stated by Creswell, a researcher must engage in at least two of these procedures in order to achieve trustworthiness and authenticity. In this case study the participants were involved in peer reviewing as well as triangulation, this being central to the design of this case study.

### **Ethical Dimensions**

Several researchers, including Eisner and Peshkin (1990) and Breakwell, Hammond and Fife-Shaw (2000), identify five ethical principles that must be adhered to when carrying out research: Informed consent, where the researcher must acquire written informed consent before data collection. Deception should not be allowed. The right to withdraw, where participants must be assured that they can withdraw their participation at any time without any consequences or penalization. Debriefing; the researcher should ensure that participants be informed about the full aims of the research. Finally, confidentiality; the researcher must ensure that confidentiality will not be breached at any moment. In this research I adhered to the five principles mentioned.

The following ethical procedures were undertaken and approved:

1. Permission for the study from the Education Division
2. Permission for the study from the Maltese University Research Ethics Committee

3. Permission for the study from the College Provincial
4. Full ethical approval from Northumbria University.

Although going through the above four main processes was both a long and arduous journey, it ensured a depth of learning. The processes set the scene for the need to become more selective and helped with both the planning and the documentation of the overall study as outlined in the Main features of research design, Figure 2. The process also gave me the assurance that my research was ethically sound, once the four procedures were approved. On approval they were then implemented faithfully, remaining true to the following ethical concerns, rigour, validity, reliability and trustworthiness. Due to my involvement within the school, I ensured that all respondents and participants were given an explanation of what the study was about and what will be done with the information gathered. Confidentiality and anonymity of the research was emphasized. Any personal data would not be revealed.

It is my belief that that schools in Malta will benefit from this research, resulting in improved outcomes for disabled students. I will also ensure that the participants in the study, namely the students, their parents, the teaching teams and senior management gain as much from this research as possible. This position is rooted in the participatory paradigm in conjunction with the ethos of emancipatory disability research approach as discussed early in the chapter.

## **Data Collection**

The first stage of my study was carrying out the pilot study. Before conducting my data collection, it was important to pretest the questionnaires and the observational checklist, and to receive feedback from professionals in the field regarding the interview and the focus group questions.



## **Questionnaires.**

I submitted the pilot study questionnaires to ten parents of students in the college on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2008, as I felt that they could give the most sensitive insight into their child's experience at school. I wanted to see how accessible the questionnaires were to the parents. I also wanted to get their feedback in order to see if any different approaches needed to be considered. The Parents' questionnaire consisted of 17 questions, including both open and closed questions. The aim of the questions was to get the parents' opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion of disabled students in the college, and also to evaluate the experiences of students and parents in a college that aims at being an inclusive educational body. In order to make the pilot study valid I chose to include 8 parents of non-disabled students and 2 parents of disabled students, in order to reflect the mixed ability profile of the school population with regard to disability. I sampled a cross-section of the school population, deciding to include parents of students in each year group. Two parents of students in each year group were approached and asked to take part in the pilot study. Two parents of disabled students in Junior and Senior School were also approached. I decided to choose students from these year groups because I feel that they have a history at the school and that their parents were most likely to have enlightening opinions regarding the inclusion of their child in the school. All ten parents approached accepted the terms of the pilot study.

The evaluation feedback sheet concluded that it did not take more than 40 minutes to carry out the questionnaire. The parents seemed to appreciate the open-ended questions and were confluent in their answers. This demonstrated that the parents took the exercise seriously. All questions were answered, suggesting that all the parents found the questionnaire to be user-friendly. The opinions given were relevant to the research and no indication was given that further questions needed to be added for parents of non-disabled students.

The main conclusion that I drew from the pilot study was that further questions needed to be added for those parents who had a disabled son at the school. Although I began this study hoping to put the same questions to parents of all students at the school, I realized through the piloting of the questionnaire that inclusion is a much broader issue for parents of disabled students. I therefore added a secondary questionnaire for parents of disabled children to complete. This questionnaire aimed to give the parents a chance to evaluate more fully the education that their children receive at the school. The additional questions will only strengthen the reliability of the case study. The final version of the questionnaire is found in Appendix D.

### **Junior and Senior School Students Questionnaires.**

The feedback from the pilot student questionnaires showed beyond doubt that the students were both willing and able to answer the questions, and also enjoyed being asked their opinions. Younger students tackled the open-ended questions by using single words or very short phrases; the mean length of answer increased with age. Due to the students' enthusiasm, the decision was taken to give all students the opportunity to answer the questionnaire at school. The student questionnaires are found in Appendices E and F.

### **Interview and Focus Groups Questions.**

Two independent professionals working in the field together with two parents, one of a disabled student and one of a non-disabled student, discussed the interview and focus group questions. The questions used to guide the interview had been developed on the basis of the aim of the research, the literature, and discussion with other professionals and parent participants working in the area of inclusion. The feedback received was that

the questions for both the interviews and the focus groups were in line with current research literature and were not biased. They were found to cover a broad enough aspect of the field to provide sufficient information to draw conclusions regarding the status of inclusive education at the college. The wording and order in which the questions were asked was changed depending on how the interview progressed (Corbetta, 2003). The format allowed for further clarification, explanation and probing when new views and opinions emerged (Gray, 2009). The interview schedules for heads of school and the discussion guidelines for the focus groups with teacher-facilitator teams and assistant heads are found in Appendices H and I respectively.

### **Observational Checklists.**

Break time is also the time where students learn about the harsh realities of life. I therefore felt that observations during break time would be the most telling about the inclusive experience. Inclusion with their peers at break would highlight both the disabled students' and the non-disabled students' interaction with one another. A lot of emphasis is placed on how non-disabled friends have to help disabled students with things that they are perceived to need or want help with due to their impairment. However, it is equally important to recognise that disabled students are just as able in other ways, and breaks should be an area where relationships can be played out and students can interact positively with each other. So the purpose of this checklist was to evaluate the reality of the students' experiences.

I carried out the observational checklists on three consecutive days during midday supervision, which lasts for one hour. I found that during my observations many of the students on the playground came up to me requesting attention. This obviously hindered my ability to observe other students. Following this slight distraction, together with feedback from my professional colleagues and participants, I spent time in the playground so

that the students would regard me as no more than a regular supervisor. The observational checklist is found in Appendix J.

### **The Actual Data Collection.**

The distribution of the parents' questionnaires was carried out over a series of parents' conferences during the first week of November 2008. Parents were met individually and were asked for their verbal consent to take part in a pilot study for this research programme. They were handed the questionnaire together with an evaluation sheet of the questionnaire itself. The parents were given the choice of filling them in on the premises or taking them home and sending the completed forms with their children. In the event that they chose to fill the forms there and then, the parents were given privacy, ensuring that all questionnaires were self-administered. All parents were asked to return the completed forms within 5 days.

Understanding disabled students and non-disabled students active participation in their school life, together with the variables that influence their lives, is a fundamental part of this research. Student questionnaires were divided into Junior students and Secondary students, and were designed and modified to make sure that the questions were set out in an age-appropriate format, respecting the differences in the developmental stages between the Junior and Senior School students. In line with the social model of disability, the students were positioned in this research as participants rather than objects.. Questions were meaningful to the students and encouraged the students to think about their experiences and everyday lives at school. The questionnaire was carried out on the school premise during the first three weeks of the Easter Term 2009. The students were given the choice to participate or not, and were assured confidentiality. They were also thanked for their participation and assured that their views were going to be taken seriously. Any questions they had regarding the questionnaires were answered by myself; I am well known to the students and have built a good relationship with them. Students were given the questionnaires in their

classroom settings and were supported with the reading of the questionnaire in Grades One and Two. Also, any student requiring help to access the questionnaire was supported as needed. The procedures were explained, and the students' important role as participants in this research about their school was stressed.

I decided to include a questionnaire aimed at eliciting teachers' attitudes and practice towards including disabled students in their classes because of teachers' interest in wanting to be a part of the research. Most of the teachers wanted to be included in the focus groups and, after being approached by several teachers from both sectors of the school, and after seeking the advice of my supervisors, I decided to administer a questionnaire for those teachers could not participate in one of the four focus groups. As it is imperative to create equal opportunities for all learners to learn and to succeed, the teachers' role is a strong determinant of how a school addresses the educational needs of disabled students in a non-threatening, supportive learning environment.

The heads of school were chosen for interviews due to the fact they lead the school in its journey towards the inclusion of disabled students. As the research focus is on evaluating the experience of an inclusive school, it was indeed critical to understand their experiences, perceptions and values about including disabled students, in their own way. The two interviews with the participants took place in their respective offices, one after school hours and the other during school hours. Both heads of school were not only aware of, but also fully involved in, the practice of inclusive education at the school. Both interviews were recorded and the participants had control over the recorder. In fact, during one of the interviews one of the participants switched off the recorder to explain a sensitive issue. Notes were taken throughout the interviews and then fully written up that same day. The interviewees reviewed the transcripts to confirm that they were a true representation of what they had said.

The four focus group participants worked in and across teaching teams throughout the school. Their participation was on a voluntary basis. Each Focus Group had a representative from administration, either an Assistant Head or a Form Coordinator. The rest of the complement was representative of the whole staff, being made up of teachers and LSAs working together in their respective teaching teams. The teacher participants are referred to by their focus group number, gender, subject or class teacher, and grade level. LSAs are referred to by their focus group number, grade level, class or subject they support. When there were two LSAs in the same class, they were referred to as either LSA 1 or LSA 2. During the focus groups participants used Maltese and English interchangeably at times. Focus groups 1, 2 and 3 were recorded and notes were taken. Focus group 4 was not recorded as two of the participants felt uncomfortable with the recorder on. Notes were taken during all four focus groups and written up in detail the same afternoon of each focus group. All focus groups were held in their respective sections of the school and during school hours, taking place during the midday break, which is 50 minutes long. In fact, the participants were very generous in giving up their break, as was also the administration for giving their seal of approval and for the importance they placed on this research by accommodating the four focus groups during school hours. Table 3.2 above provides a detailed description of the participants of the four Focus Groups.

## **Data Analysis**

The use of mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) to gather respondents' views and analysis data is increasingly advocated as an approach to knowing the social world (Cresswell, 2003). Data analysis takes place to try to understand, group and display data gathered in response to the research question.

When conducting a case study, three principles of data collection can maximise the benefits of the above sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). The first is to use multiple sources of evidence which, if done properly, enables data triangulation. Also, the collection of data from multiple sources is more expansive than if data were to be collected from a single source (Denzin, 1978, p. 61). The second principle is to create a case study database. Yin (2009) recommends keeping the data or evidence and reports separated. The last principle is to maintain a chain of evidence, which increases the reliability of the information. Data analysis in qualitative research can be defined as consisting of three concurrent flows of action: data reduction, data display, and conclusions and verification. These flows are present in parallel during and after the collection of data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this case study respondents' experiences and views were gathered, classified and described through Data Reduction, Data Display and Conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the collected data. It needs to be reduced in order to make the data more readily accessible and understandable (Berg, 2004; Kvale, 1996). Data display is intended to organize the collected data in such a way that it permits the drawing of conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Berg, 2004). The third component of the data analysis process is the drawing of conclusions and verification. During the collection of data, no definitive conclusions should be made, and any preliminary conclusions should be verified during the process (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data was classified through thematic analysis, and descriptive statistics were used to '*organize and summarize*' quantitative data gathered to describe its characteristics (Heinman, 2000, p.26). At this stage of the research participants were not involved. However, they were given the transcripts and my interpretations and analysis both to confirm accuracy and to give them the opportunity to review and ensure their voice had been listened to and had been recorded appropriately.

### **Data reduction.**

Initially Anticipatory Data Reduction took place whilst choosing the research questions and selecting the methods of data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After data collection, data was selected, organized, categorized into groups to prevent repetition, and was displayed (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Thody, 2006). In this study, data reduction was accomplished by reading and re-reading data from open-ended questions in the questionnaires, transcribing interviews, and re-reading transcripts to bring out recurring themes.

### **Data display.**

Through Data Display information gathered was further 'compressed' and visually displayed in order to create an understanding of the information presented, thus making it easier to draw conclusions from the data gathered (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Scott & Morrison, 2006). Methods for displaying data in this study were graphs, tables and matrices.

### **Drawing conclusions/verification.**

Through triangulation (using questionnaires with closed and open-ended questions, focus groups, interviews, observations and documentation) both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. Having both types of data increases the validity and reliability of the study (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure that an actual picture of the major stakeholders' experience of inclusion was gained, some questions similar to each other were asked in the questionnaires. Respondents' experiences could then be examined for discrepancies and to try to protect against bias. This process was also adhered to during the interviews, the focus groups and the disabled student observations.



## Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is the process of encoding collected data in themes using codes (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis was used in this study to gather data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and to bring out themes from the interviews and focus groups, leading to further understanding and interpretation of the data. A potentially useful research paradigm for implementing the interpretative paradigm is phenomenological psychology, which is primarily concerned with two phenomena: understanding *human experience*, both in terms of *noema* (what is experienced) and *noesis* (the way it is experienced), and how *meaning* or sense-making has arisen through those experiences (Langridge, 2007). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Langdrige, 2004) was used for the qualitative data analysis.

Thematic analysis occurred in five main steps. The transcripts were first read in order to make general notes about my thoughts of the texts' meaning. Themes were then identified as chunks that represented patterns of meaning. I tried to remain open-minded to making alterations to themes and their associated meaning throughout this stage. This reduced the likelihood of imposing meaning, and so increased accurate portrayal of participants' perceptions and experience of inclusion (see Appendices M, N and O for samples of the analysed transcripts). The third stage included structuring themes in the form of hierarchies and clusters of perceptions and experiences. A summary list with super-ordinate and subordinate themes together with related verbatim quotations was then produced. After this was carried out for the first transcript, the summary list of themes was modified accordingly, to be applied to the second transcript. This occurred consecutively for each transcript until all data was integrated into one main summary list for the different qualitative tools used. The three analysis's all included master and constituent themes, together with verbatim quotes in order to capture the perceptions and experiences of participants. Various

themes associated with intrinsic and external factors emerged from the analysis.

As part of the analysis process, a purposive sample of transcripts was given to four external readers (two participants and two academics) to read and analyze (Hill, 1997; Marchant *et al.*, 1999). This interpretative validation process helped to confirm the emerging themes and sub themes (Maxwell, 1992).

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

In the data analysis process the raw data gathered from the questionnaires was inputted into SPSS version 19 in order to make inferences about the population using the information provided by the sample. Crosstabs, descriptive statistics tables, clustered bar graphs and error bar graphs were used to summarise the data gathered from respondents. In this case study, most of the data was gathered through close-ended questions. The purpose was to provide a picture of the respondents' perceptions of the benefits and difficulties of including disabled students in a mainstream school and to establish the different factors that support or negate inclusive education. Hypothesis testing was carried out via the One-way ANOVA and Chi-Square tests. Statistical inference is intended to make generalizations about inclusive practices at the school based on information obtained from the parents, teachers and student. This is carried out in two ways; either by conducting hypothesis tests or by computing the 95% confidence intervals for population parameters.

The Chi-Square test was used to determine whether there exists a significant association between two categorical variables in a two-way contingency table. The null hypothesis specifies that there is no association between the two variables and will be accepted if the p-value exceeds the 0.05 level of significance. The alternative hypothesis specifies that there is a

significant association between the two variables and will be accepted if the p-value is less than the 0.05 criterion.

The One-way ANOVA test was used to compare the mean rating scores between different groups of respondents. The null hypothesis specifies that the actual mean rating scores elicited by the groups are comparable and is accepted if the p-value exceeds the 0.05 level of significance. The alternative hypothesis specifies that the mean rating scores differ significantly between the groups and is accepted if the p-value is less than the 0.05 criterion.

A result can be generalized to the whole population, when the alternative hypothesis is accepted. These tests, particularly the chi square test, will be used extensively in the following chapter.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Observing disability and inclusive practices from a whole school perspective provides a wider perspective of the individuals who make up the 'whole'. However this has its limitations because of its predisposition to retreat into the subjectivity of the individual and his or her bodily experiences, and thus to move away from attending to the "empirical features of the impaired individual's interaction with the material world" (Williams & Busby, 2000, p. 174). Disabled students have to be recognised as students like any others, but exploring if and if not and why their needs and entitlements are not currently being met by our educational system, can be subjective. Whilst this research aimed to facilitate a fundamental restructuring of one school, the dissemination of this one experience is a slow process. One might also consider the research done in a single school to be somewhat limited as only a small sample of the population is being studied.

Accountability to the disabled students and their families is key to any changes that are to be made within an inclusive educational system. This

posed particular problems in the way in which this study only followed the emancipatory ethos as a guide, rather than in engaging in the full emancipatory research model.

The school under study being a boys' church school meant that it was only possible to investigate the perceptions, experiences, attitudes and reactions of boys and sons coming from the church school sector and all the family culture that this brings with it.

Another limitation to be considered is the problem of objectivity. Whilst I have made no claims to be either impartial or detached but indeed fully immersed in this research, I have tried to make my position clear to all the participants in this research whilst making sure that my choice of research methods and data collection strategies were logical, rigorous and open to scrutiny. Whilst the importance of the experience and voice of both disabled and non-disabled students and parents was an essential element to this study, the school experienced as the disabling society was examined. Presenting all these experiences with both understanding and not falling into the trap of believing this research will automatically change the disabled students individual school experience, but trying to find solutions and practical outcomes and then disseminating my findings, requires innovation and a goal that is to be reached by all the participants in this research. This is a tall order and I am conscious that this might not have been reached.

## **Conclusion**

Setting research methods within a specific conceptual framework is important to the research as this helped the researcher reach the goals proposed for the study. I chose a single case study with the aim of documenting any changes that may have occurred through the inclusion of disabled students in a mainstream school. In analyzing and then presenting the findings of this case study, I took great care not to succumb to tunnel

vision (Verschuren, 2003). Tunnel vision is caused by observation at a single point in time and/or observation detached from context or relationships. Unlike what is acceptable for quantitative research, a qualitative researcher must not generalize the findings of a case study. Sampling in case studies is too small to make generalizations, which could apply to a broader population. However, 'it is the richness of the detail provided by a well conducted case that develops insights, that have resonance in other social sites, thereby allowing theoretical connections to be explored and established' (MacPherson et al., 2000: pp 49-61).

The research examines the role and experiences that the stakeholders had in working towards an inclusive experience within the school together with exploring the processes responsible for an inclusive educational experience. I have reflected upon and feel that this piece of research should not be prescriptive or in fact even conclusive, but suggestive and convincing in how it will speak of the way one particular school addresses change, the need for change and the actual implementation of change to the response of including disabled students in mainstream education. However, such developments should not be received uncritically and, as a researcher, I have made a declaration of my position in the research, of congruence between method and methodology, and given a transparent overview of my approach to rigour, together with a full explanation of my analytical approach.

Research can be inherently political, and plays an important role in transforming and changing the world, and not only in describing it. In other words, the impact of research into the life of Society goes far beyond theoretical circles (Finkelstein, 1980). This study has already provided concrete directions for schools in Malta, as other schools have started to adopt the system of subject LSAs. This model is now recommended by the Ministry of Education, Employment, and the Family, and can be found in the National Curriculum Framework (2011). This research responds and adds to both the theory and the practice of inclusive education whilst providing a

clear insight to both achievements and challenges that lie ahead in the field of inclusive education.

In the following two chapters, results are presented and discussion of the results follows in chapter Six. I choose to present the results on their own, because of the richness of the data, out of respect for the participants and given that I am immersed in the subject of this research, I was also very concerned about being truthful and about expressing unbiased interpretation of the data.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Presentation of Findings**

#### **The True Picture**

## **Introduction**

This chapter presents the main findings of this study emerging from the data collection and analysis related to various aspects of inclusive education as experienced in a boy's college by parents, students and teachers.

Categorical variables were analyzed pair-wise using crosstabs and clustered bar graphs. Rating scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics tables and line graphs. Open-ended questions in both the parent and student questionnaires were analyzed and described using frequency tables and bar graphs. Statistical inference was carried using hypothesis testing. The Chi-square test was used to determine whether there exists an association between two categorical variables; whereas the One Way ANOVA test was used to compare mean rating scores between several statements. For both tests a 0.05 level of significance was utilized. The results are clustered into three sections: the data analysis for the i. parents' questionnaires, ii. students' questionnaires and iii. teachers' questionnaires.

## **Data Analysis of Parents' Questionnaire**

The first task is to determine whether there exists an association between parents' responses regarding their son's inclusive educational experience categorized by parents of non-disabled students and disabled students. The Chi test will be used to determine whether the association is significant. The null hypothesis specifies that the association is not significant and is accepted if the p-value exceeds the 0.05 level of significance. The alternative hypothesis specifies that the association is significant and is accepted if the p-value is less than the 0.05 criterion. The Chi square test basically compare row percentages in a two-way contingency table, contrasting the proportion of parents of disabled children agreeing/disagreeing with a statement with that of parents of non-disabled children. The p-value of the Chi square test will exceed the 0.05 level



of significance when the difference between the two proportions is marginal. Conversely, the p-value will be less than the 0.05 criterion when the difference between the two proportions is considerable. In other words, a significant outcome (p-value less than 0.05) indicates a significant discrepancy between perceptions of parents of disabled/non-disabled children that is not attributed to chance. It should be noted that the magnitude of the p-value does not depend solely on the difference between the two proportions but also on the sample size. For instance, a difference of 10% between the two proportions is very likely not to be significant when the sample comprises of just 100 participants; however a difference of 7% between the two proportions is very likely to be significant if the sample size is increased to 1000 participants. This is the main reason why the Chi Square test was required.

It is evident from Table 3 that a large proportion of the respondents (99.4%) perceived that the school values their son. Moreover, the only parent who elicited that the school does not value his son is a parent of a non-disabled student. The p-value 0.499 exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, implying that parents of non-disabled students and disabled students agree that the school values their sons. The cluster bar graph/cross tabs display no evidence of parental bias

Table 3  
Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by their perception of how the school values their son

			Parents of		Total
			Non-disabled students	Disabled students	
Do you feel that the school values your son?	Yes	Count	107	49	156
		Percentage	99.1%	100.0%	99.4%
	No	Count	1	0	1
		Percentage	.9%	.0%	.6%
Total		Count	108	49	157
		Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 0.457, v = 1, p = 0.499$$

Table 4

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by how they feel the school responds to their concerns

			Parents of		Total
			Non-disabled students	Disabled students	
Do you feel the school takes your concerns seriously?	Yes	Count	101	48	149
		Percentage	93.5%	96.0%	94.3%
	No	Count	7	2	9
		Percentage	6.5%	4.0%	5.7%
Total		Count	108	50	158
		Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 0.392, \nu = 1, p = 0.531$$

Table 4 displays a large proportion of the parents (94.3%) who feel that the school takes their concerns seriously. Another interesting fact is that the proportion of parents of non-disabled students (6.5%) who think that the school does not take their concerns seriously exceeds the proportion of parents of disabled students (4.0%). However, since the p-value (0.720) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance we deduce that the proportions do not differ significantly; hence there is no evidence of parental bias regarding how they feel towards the schools' response to their concerns.

Table 5

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by their perception of whether it is right for disabled students to be included in the school

			Parents of		Total
			Non-disabled students	Disabled students	
Do you think that placing the disabled student in school is a good idea?	Yes	Count	98	49	147
		Percentage	90.7%	98.0%	93.0%
	No	Count	10	1	11
		Percentage	9.3%	2.0%	7.0%
Total		Count	108	50	158
		Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 2.781, \nu = 1, p = 0.095$$

Table 5 shows that there is a large proportion of parents of disabled students (98%) compared to parents of non-disabled students (90.7%) who think that placing disabled students in the school is a good idea. Although the difference in proportion is more conspicuous, however it is not big enough to generalize the result since the p-value (0.175) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance. Moreover, the vast majority (88.1%) of parents of disabled students stated that they are satisfied with their son's education and the school in general.

Table 6  
Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by their concerns regarding mixed ability classes

			Group		Total
			Parents of non-disabled students	Parents of disabled students	
Do you still have concerns about your son being with students with different abilities and disabilities?	Yes	Count	28	16	44
		Percentage	36.8%	51.6%	41.1%
	No	Count	48	15	63
		Percentage	63.2%	48.4%	58.9%
Total		Count	76	31	107
		Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 1.984, \nu = 1, p = 0.159$$

Table 6 shows the proportion of parents of disabled students (51.6%) who have concerns about the fact that their sons being in a mixed ability class exceeds the proportion of parents of non-disabled students (36.8%) who have these concerns. However, since the p-value (0.159) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance it implies that the difference in proportion is not significant. This lack of significance may partly be attributed to the small sample size (if a larger sample had to be considered a difference of 14.8% might have turned out to be significant).

Table 7

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by whether they were consulted about the inclusion process

			Group		Total
			Parents of non-disabled students	Parents of disabled students	
Were you consulted about the inclusion process?	Yes	Count	14	25	39
		Percentage	15.1%	64.1%	29.5%
	No	Count	79	14	93
		Percentage	84.9%	35.9%	70.5%
Total	Count		93	39	132
	Percentage		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 31.76, \nu = 1, p < 0.0005$$

Table 7 shows that a large proportion of parents of disabled students (64.1%) specified that they were consulted about the inclusion process. However, only a mere (15.1%) of parents of non-disabled students said that they were consulted. The difference in proportion (49%) is significant and not attributed to chance. We can generalize that the parents of disabled students are more likely to be consulted about the inclusion process than parents of non-disabled students.

Table 8

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by their perception of whether an open door policy enhances inclusion

			Group		Total
			Parents of non-disabled students	Parents of disabled students	
Does an open door policy enhance inclusion?	Yes	Count	91	40	131
		Percentage	91.0%	97.6%	92.9%
	No	Count	9	1	10
		Percentage	9.0%	2.4%	7.1%
Total	Count		100	41	141
	Percentage		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 1.90, \nu = 1, p = 0.168$$

Table 8 displays a large proportion of parents of both disabled and non-disabled students who are eliciting that adopting an open door policy enhances inclusive education. However, the proportion of parents of disabled students (97.6%) agreeing with this statement exceeds the proportion of parents of non-disabled students (91%). However, the difference in the proportion is not significant at the 0.05 criterion.

Table 9

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by whether they attended their son's parents evening

			Have you attended your son's MAPs and IEP this academic year?		Total
			Yes	No	
Have you attended your son's parents evening?	Yes	Count	30	2	32
		Percentage	93.8%	6.3%	100.0%
	No	Count	4	0	4
		Percentage	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count		34	2	36
	Percentage		94.4%	5.6%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 0.265, \nu = 1, p = 0.607$$

Table 9 shows that 88.9% of the parents of disabled students stated that they had attended their son's parents evening and 94.4% attended their son's MAPs and IEP meetings. 93.8% of the parents attended both meetings; none failed to attend both meetings and six parents either went to one meeting or the other. The overall picture is that the parents of the disabled students show a great interest in their son's schooling. Table 10 shows that parents are displaying a more positive picture in the case of the last statement. Around 82% of the parents perceive that these meetings fully enhance the individual development of their son. However, only 47% perceive that these meetings fully strengthen the family, and only around 60% believe that the meetings enhance the community. So, although all three statements have a high proportion of positive rating scores, this is more conspicuous in the case of the last statement.

Table 10

Crosstab displaying frequency and percentage of parents of disabled students categorized by rating score of the value of the meetings

			In your opinion do these meetings		
			Enhance the community?	Strengthen the family?	Enhance the individual development of your son?
Rating Score	Not at all	Count	1	2	0
		Percentage	2.6%	5.3%	.0%
	Only slightly	Count	2	6	1
		Percentage	5.3%	15.8%	2.6%
	Moderately	Count	12	12	6
		Percentage	31.6%	31.6%	15.4%
	Greatly	Count	11	9	14
		Percentage	28.9%	23.7%	35.9%
	Fully	Count	12	9	18
		Percentage	31.6%	23.7%	46.2%
Total		Count	38	38	39
		Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 13.35, v = 8, p = 0.1$$

Table 11

Crosstab displaying percentages of interviewees by their perception of the quality of communication between teacher facilitator team and themselves

			How do you rate communication between the teacher facilitator team and yourself?			Total
			Very good	Fairly good	Very poor	
Who is the first person that you approach with concerns regarding your son's education	Facilitator	Count	18	1	0	19
		Percentage	94.7%	5.3%	.0%	100.0%
	Teacher	Count	6	6	1	13
		Percentage	46.2%	46.2%	7.7%	100.0%
	Teacher facilitator team	Count	13	4	0	17
		Percentage	76.5%	23.5%	.0%	100.0%
	Head of school	Count	2	0	0	2
		Percentage	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	Assistant head of school	Count	1	1	0	2
		Percentage	50.0%	50.0%	.0%	100.0%
	Teaching support consultant	Count	10	2	0	12
		Percentage	83.3%	16.7%	.0%	100.0%
	School counsellor	Count	1	1	0	2
		Percentage	50.0%	50.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	51	15	1	67
		Percentage	76.1%	22.4%	1.5%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 14.91, v = 12, p = 0.247$$

Table 11 demonstrates that a large proportion of the parents have provided a positive assessment of their communication with school staff. A large proportion of the parents assessed communication as either fairly good or very good. Only one parent stated that her communication with the teacher was poor. It should be noted, though, that the parents are providing a slightly better assessment of their communication with facilitators, teacher facilitator team, head of school and teaching support consultant; however, the difference in the communication assessment between the school staff is not significant since the p-value (0.247) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 12

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by their perception of the quality of communication between teacher facilitator team and themselves

			How do you rate communication between yourself and the school?			Total
			Very good	Fairly good	Very poor	
How do you rate communication between the teacher/facilitator team and yourself?	Very good	Count	87	18	0	105
		Percentage	57.6%	11.9%	.0%	69.5%
	Fairly good	Count	6	35	2	43
		Percentage	4.0%	23.2%	1.3%	28.5%
	Very poor	Count	0	2	1	3
		Percentage	.0%	1.3%	.7%	2.0%
Total		Count	93	55	3	151
		Percentage	61.6%	36.4%	2.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 79.208, v = 4, p < 0.0005$$

Table 12 displays that 69.5 % of the parents of disabled students specified that they had very good communication with the teacher/facilitator team, and 61.6% specified having very good communication with the school administration. Only 2% of these parents stated that they had poor communication with both teacher/facilitator team and administration.

The chi square test reveals a very strong association between these two variables and parents having good communication with the teacher/facilitator

team tended to have good communication with the school administration. In fact, 57.6% of the parents stated that they have very good communication with the teacher/facilitator team and the school, whilst 23.2% of the parents specified that their communication with the teacher/facilitator team and the school was fairly good and one parent commented that communication was very poor with both. Interestingly, there was a higher proportion of parents (11.9%) who rated communication with the teacher/facilitator better than with the school, but there was only 4% of the parents who rated the communication with the school better than with the teacher. Basically we see a more positive relationship between the teaching team and parent rather than between the parent and the school.

Table 13

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents by their perception of who they first approach with concerns regarding their son's education

			How do you rate communication between yourself and the school?		Total
			Very good	Fairly good	
Who is the first person that you approach with concerns regarding your son's education?	Facilitator	Count	17	2	19
		Percentage	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%
	Teacher	Count	7	6	13
		Percentage	53.8%	46.2%	100.0%
	Teacher facilitator team	Count	12	5	17
		Percentage	70.6%	29.4%	100.0%
	Head of school	Count	1	2	3
		Percentage	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
	Assistant head of school	Count	0	2	2
		Percentage	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Teaching support consultant	Count	7	5	12
		Percentage	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%
	School counsellor	Count	0	2	2
		Percentage	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	44	24	68
		Percentage	64.7%	35.3%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 14.87, \nu = 6, p = 0.021$$



It is evident from Table 13 that parents feel more comfortable approaching teachers, facilitators, teacher/facilitator team, or teaching support consultant rather than heads of school, assistant heads and school counsellor. The p-value (0.021) indicates that the parents are more likely to first approach the persons they feel most comfortable with. More than 53% of parents who first approached facilitators, teachers, teacher-facilitator team and teaching support consultant stated that their relationship with them was very good. Conversely, most of the parents who approached the head of school, assistant head or school counselor first stated that their relationship with them was fairly good.

Table 14

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by their perception of factors that enhance inclusion

			Response		Total
			Yes	No	
Factors enhancing inclusion	An open door policy	Count	131	10	141
		Percentage	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%
	Good communication	Count	140	2	142
		Percentage	98.6%	1.4%	100.0%
	Having common goals	Count	132	5	137
		Percentage	96.4%	3.6%	100.0%
	Feeling a part of the school team	Count	133	4	137
		Percentage	97.1%	2.9%	100.0%
	Continuous assessments	Count	122	6	128
		Percentage	95.3%	4.7%	100.0%
	Continuous examinations	Count	57	39	96
		Percentage	59.4%	40.6%	100.0%
	Extra curricular activities	Count	119	9	128
		Percentage	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%
	Having friends	Count	133	3	136
		Percentage	97.8%	2.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	967	78	1045
		Percentage	92.5%	7.5%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 174.297, v = 7, p < 0.0005$$

Table 14 shows that a large proportion of parents stated that inclusion is enhanced by having good communication (98.6%), having friends (97.8%), feeling being part of the school team (97.1%), having common goals (96.4%), having continuous assessment (95.3%), having extra curricular activities (93.0%), and having an open door policy (92.9%). However, only 59.4% of the parents stated that continuous examinations enhanced inclusion. It is to be noted that almost one-third of the parents did not answer this question, indicating a lack of opinion. The chi square test indicates that the differences between these proportions are significant and may not be attributed to chance. The general picture is quite positive, but it does show parents' concern about examinations and their impact on inclusive education.

Table 15

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of disabled students by their perception of what is important about school contacts

			Does an open door policy enhance inclusion?		Total
			Yes	No	
What do you consider important about school contacts?	Availability	Count	24	0	24
		Percentage	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
	Approachability	Count	30	1	31
		Percentage	96.8%	3.2%	100.0%
	Accessibility	Count	14	0	14
		Percentage	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	68	1	69	
	Percentage	98.6%	1.4%	100.0%	

$$\chi^2 = 1.244, v = 2, p = 0.537$$

Table 15 show that 44.9% of parents of disabled students deemed approachability as an important factor of school contacts. This is followed by availability (34.8%) and accessibility (20.3%). Almost all parents feel that an open door policy enhances inclusion, irrespective of what they consider important about school contacts. Moreover, this group of parents agrees entirely that good communication facilitates inclusion.

Table 16

Crosstab displaying percentages of parents of non-disabled/disabled students by their perception of whether good communication and/or an open door policy enhance inclusion

			Does good communication enhance inclusion?		Total
			Yes	No	
Does an open door policy enhance inclusion?	Yes	Count	129	1	130
		Percentage	92.1%	0.7%	92.9%
	No	Count	9	1	10
		Percentage	6.4%	0.7%	7.1%
Total	Count		138	2	140
	Percentage		98.6%	1.4%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 5.619, v = 1, p = 0.018$$

Table 16 displays that a large proportion of the parents (92.1%) agreed that good communication and an open door policy both enhance inclusion. There was one parent who disagreed that these two practices facilitate inclusion. The proportion of parents (6.4%) who feel that good communication only enhances inclusion is significantly larger than the proportion of parents (0.7%) who feel that an open door policy only facilitates inclusion. This implies that parents maintain that having good communication is a better strategy than having an open door policy.

Table 17

Descriptive statistics table displaying mean rating scores and standard deviations provided by parents for skills that they perceive important for their son to learn at school

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Participates in the curriculum	4.00	0.877	2	5
Learn skills for life	4.93	0.267	4	5
Become numerate and literate	4.63	0.586	3	5
Learn to listen and follow directions	4.70	0.564	3	5
Learn to share and play well with his peer group	4.65	0.580	3	5
Learn to be creative	4.25	0.840	2	5
Learn more communication skills	4.63	0.838	1	5
Become bilingual	3.78	1.074	1	5
Learn confidence and independence	4.75	0.630	2	5
Become independent	4.70	0.648	2	5
Learn to take part in extra curricular activities	4.30	0.758	2	5
Be a valued member of a team	4.65	0.580	3	5
Make valuable and lasting friendships	4.53	0.599	3	5
Learn to follow classroom and routines	4.45	0.783	2	5
Learn self-care skills	4.72	0.506	3	5

$$F = 8.657, v_1 = 14, v_2 = 600, p < 0.0005$$

Each statement describing parental expectation of what they felt was important for their son to learn was rated on a five point scale where 1 corresponds to 'Not important at all' and 5 corresponds to 'Extremely important'. Table 17 displays the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum rating score for each statement. All the statements have a mean rating score above 3, implying that the parents feel that all the selected statements are important. However, some statements are more important than others because they have significantly higher mean rating scores. 'Learn skills for life' (4.93) had the highest mean rating score followed by 'Learn confidence and independence' (4.75), 'Learn self care skills' (4.72), 'Become independent' (4.70), 'Learn to listen and follow directions' (4.70), 'Be a valued member of a team' (4.65), 'Learn to share and play well with his peer group' (4.65), 'Learn more communication skills' (4.63), 'Become numerate and literate' (4.63), 'Make valuable, lasting friendships' (4.53), 'Learn to follow classroom rules and routines' (4.45), 'Learn to take part in extracurricular activities' (4.30), 'Learn to be creative' (4.25), 'Follow and participate in the mainstream curriculum' (4.0) and 'Become bilingual' (3.78).

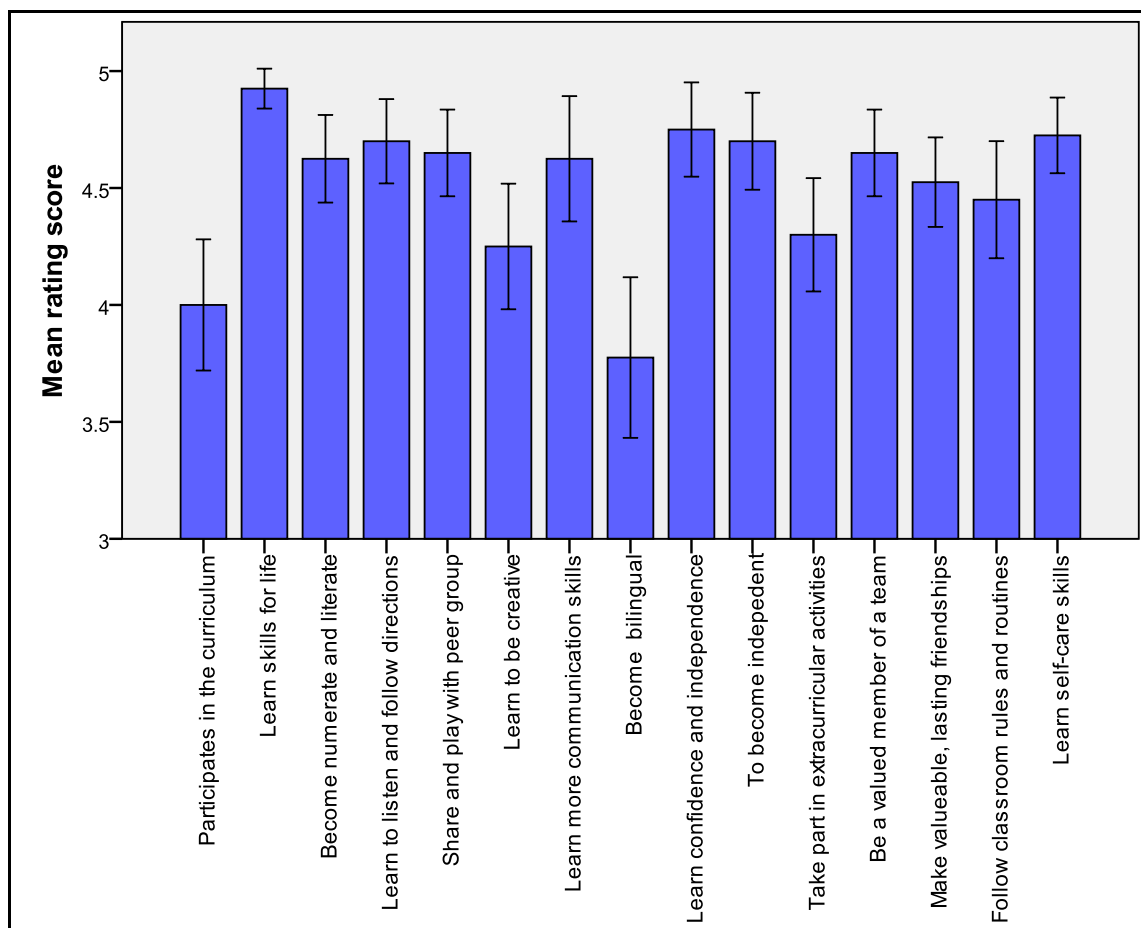


Figure 3  
Error bar graph displaying the mean rating scores and 95% confidence intervals provided by parents for skills that they perceive important for their son to learn at school

Figure 3 displays the 95% confidence intervals for the mean rating scores. These confidence intervals are essential because they provide a range of values for the actual mean rating score for a particular statement if the whole population of parents in Malta had to be included in the study. For instance, we are 95% confident that the mean rating score for 'Learn skills for life' lies between 4.84 and 5.0. Moreover we are 95% confident that the mean rating score for 'Become bilingual' lies between 3.35 and 4.07. The fact that the two confidence intervals do not overlap indicates that the mean rating scores elicited for the two statements differ significantly. Inference can also be carried out

through hypothesis testing using the One Way ANOVA test. Figures 9 to 16 include the parents' responses for open-ended questions.

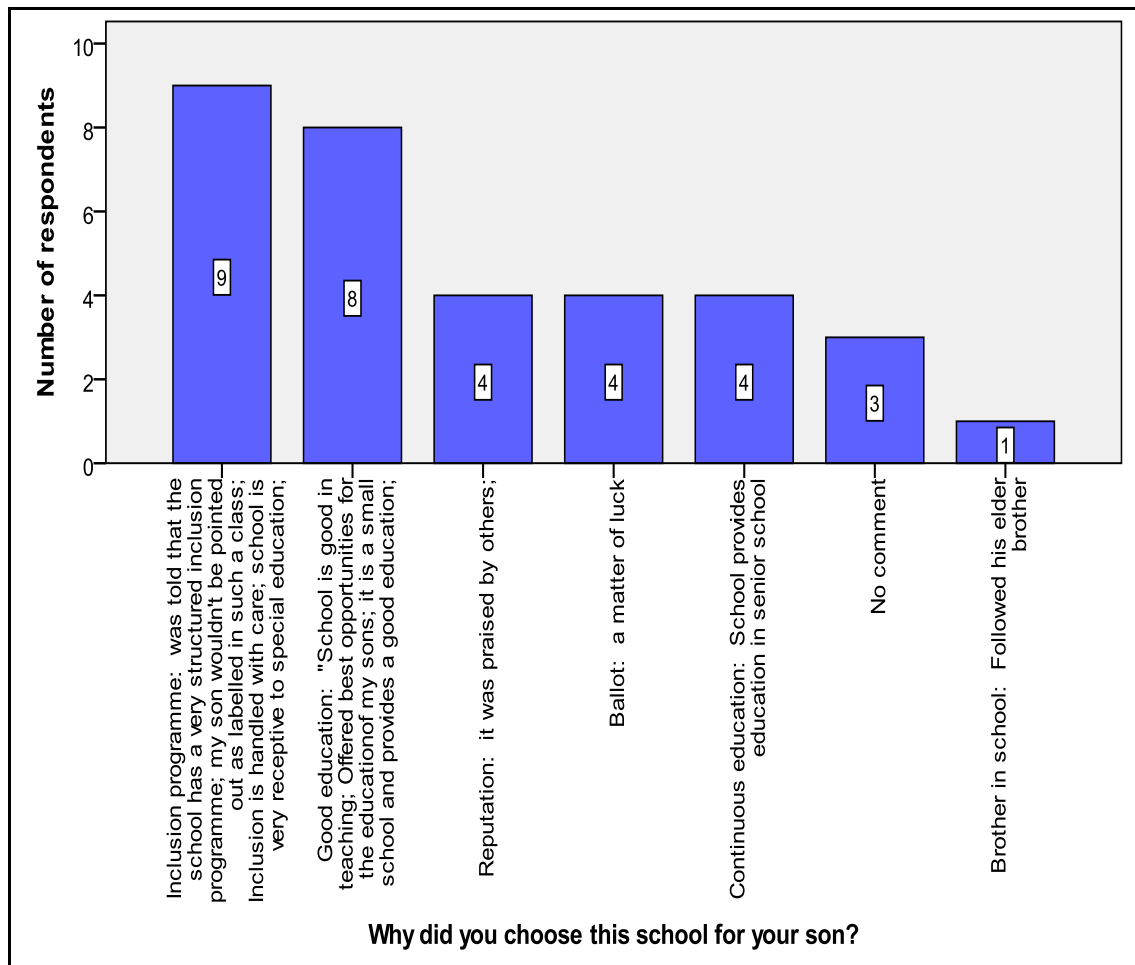


Figure 4  
Choice of school

Figure 4 portrays that having a choice in their disabled son's school placement was not an illusion for these parents. Factors influencing parental choice of the school were based on the school having sound inclusive school practices, providing a good education, the school's reputation and the fact the school offers continuous education from primary through to secondary. The fact that the school did not label their son was an important consideration in the parents' choice of the school.

Figure 5 displays that most parents are positive about their contribution to their son's educational programme. Inclusion gives the chance for schools to work in co-operation with parents, and the respondents confirm that this is a practice at this school. Some of the parents confirm this when they speak about discussion between teachers and parents. A few parents had a negative experience or provided no feedback.

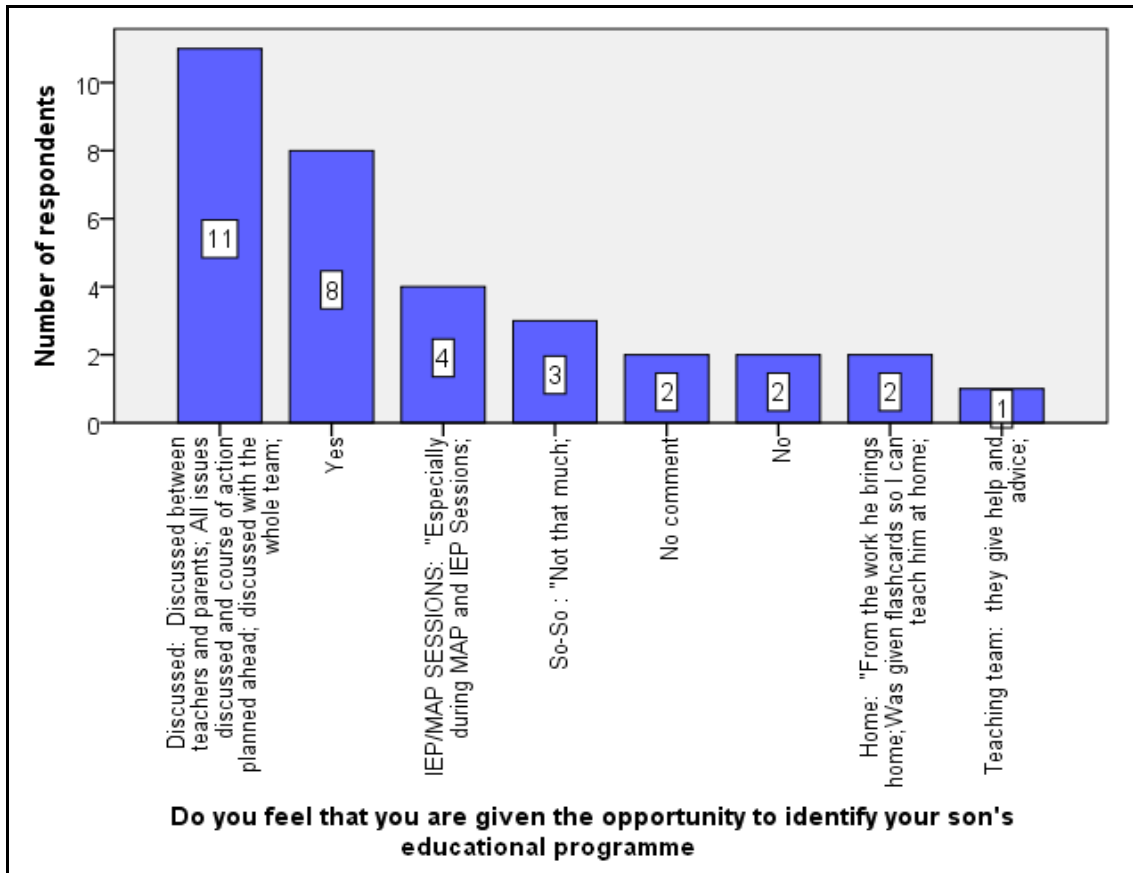


Figure 5  
Parental participation in educational processes

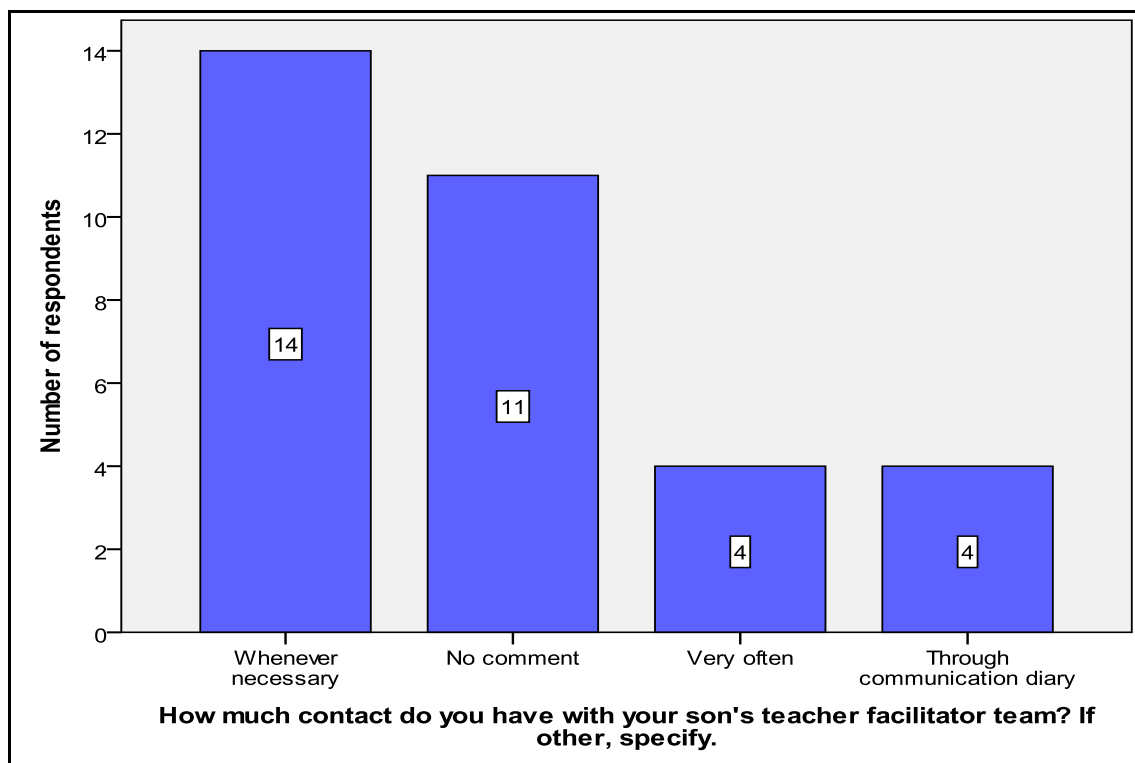


Figure 6  
Communication between parents and teaching team

The relationship between parents and their son's teaching team is critical to the educational experience for their son and the final outcome of his school experience. This was corroborated in Figure 6 with a large number of the parents saying they have regular contact with their son's teaching team. However, a number of parents did not provide any comments.

Effective and proactive communication on a regular basis is one of the most important aspects of success for including disabled students in mainstream schools. In Figure 7 this is supported by 10 of the parents stating that they feel their son's improvement is down to the excellent communication they had with their son's LSA. LSAs are often seen as the link between parents and teachers. Contact between the teachers themselves was seen as needing to be improved upon, as also the importance of both the parents and the school being open to suggestions without becoming defensive.



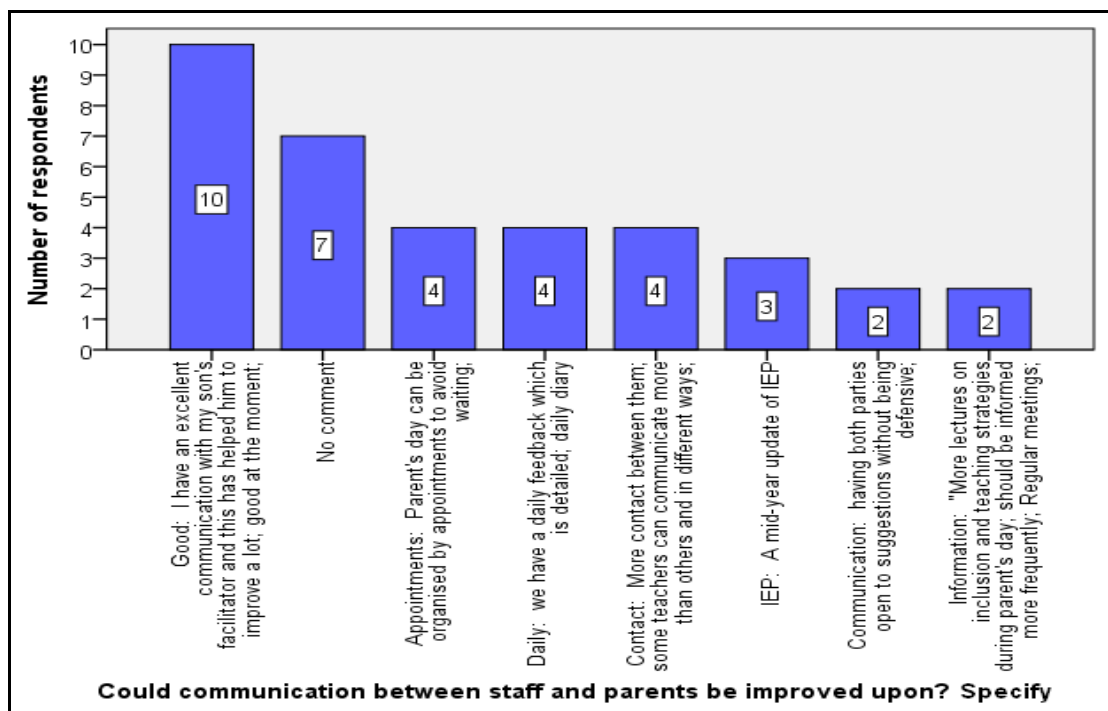


Figure 7  
Quality of communication between parents and school

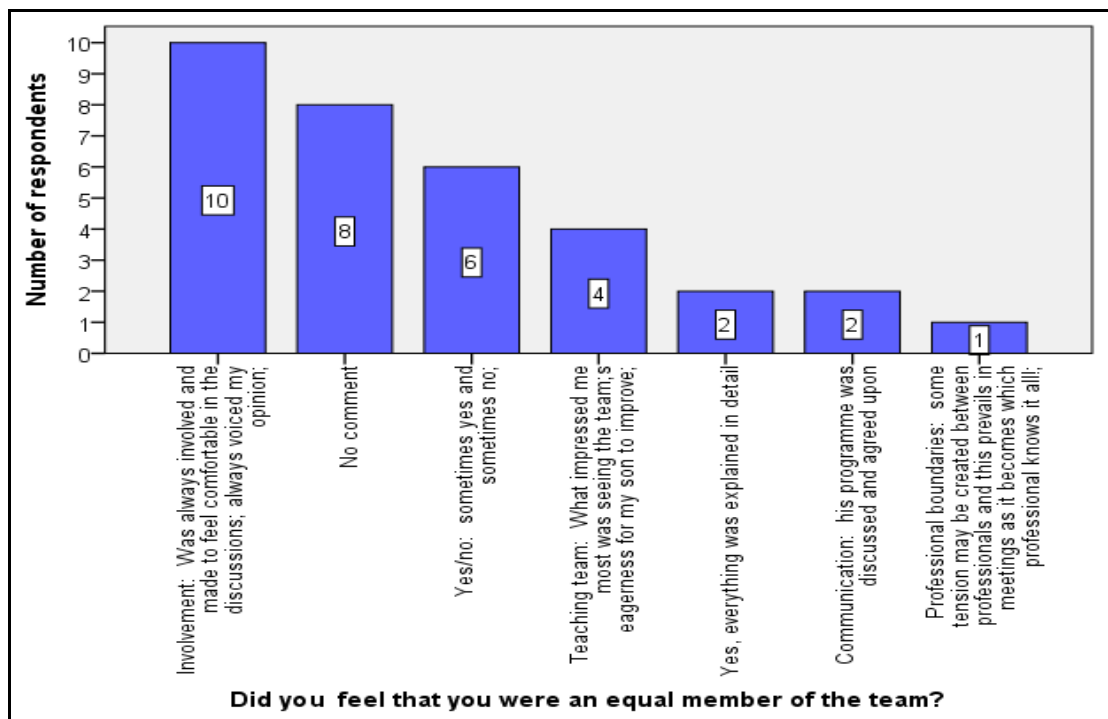


Figure 8  
Partnership between parents and educational team

Parents of disabled students are not a homogenous group with similar needs that schools often see them as being. Parents vary regarding their energy levels, their ability in confronting school staff, their level of education, their problem solving skills, and in their capabilities of being their son's advocates. Figure 8 corroborates this, and one can see parents feel that they are equal members of the school team but with some reservations.

To analyze the open-ended questions a number of bar graphs (Figures 9 – 41) were generated displaying the frequency of different perceptions of the participants' experiences of including disabled students in the school. Replies which were similar, either negative or positive, were grouped together to avoid too many categories with a similar meaning. Participants were invited to review these categorisations and confirmed their output. Statements that were highlighted by a single participant were also included.

Figure 9 shows that the concerns of parents that surround the inclusion of disabled students in their son's class are about academic gain not being watered down. Parents ask themselves 'Will the disabled students receive the support they are entitled to?' Other concerns are based around the teaching staff's abilities and attitudes. The negative comments are about whether the non-disabled students may be bored with the repetition that is perceived as needed for the disabled student.

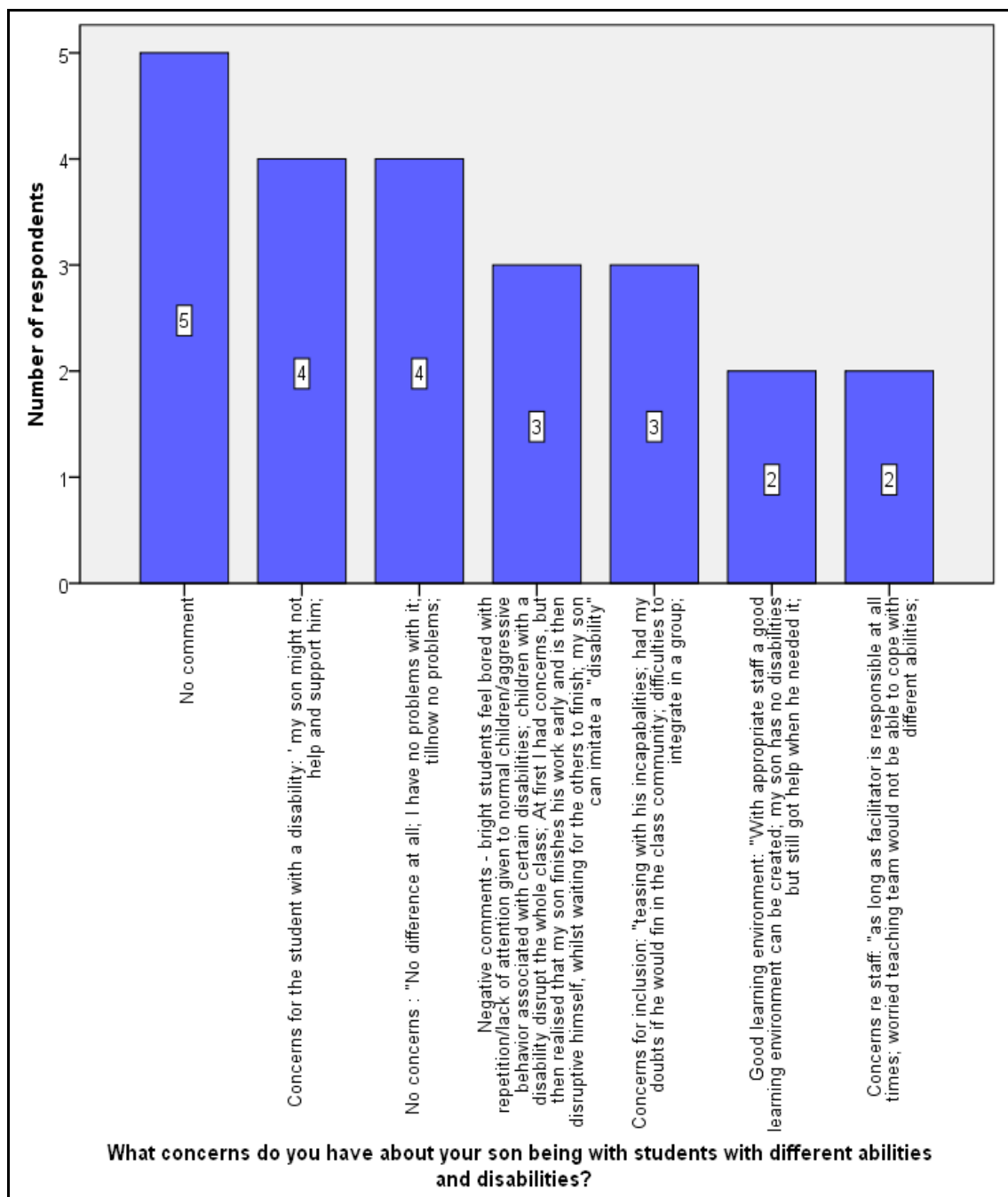


Figure 9  
Parental concerns around inclusive education

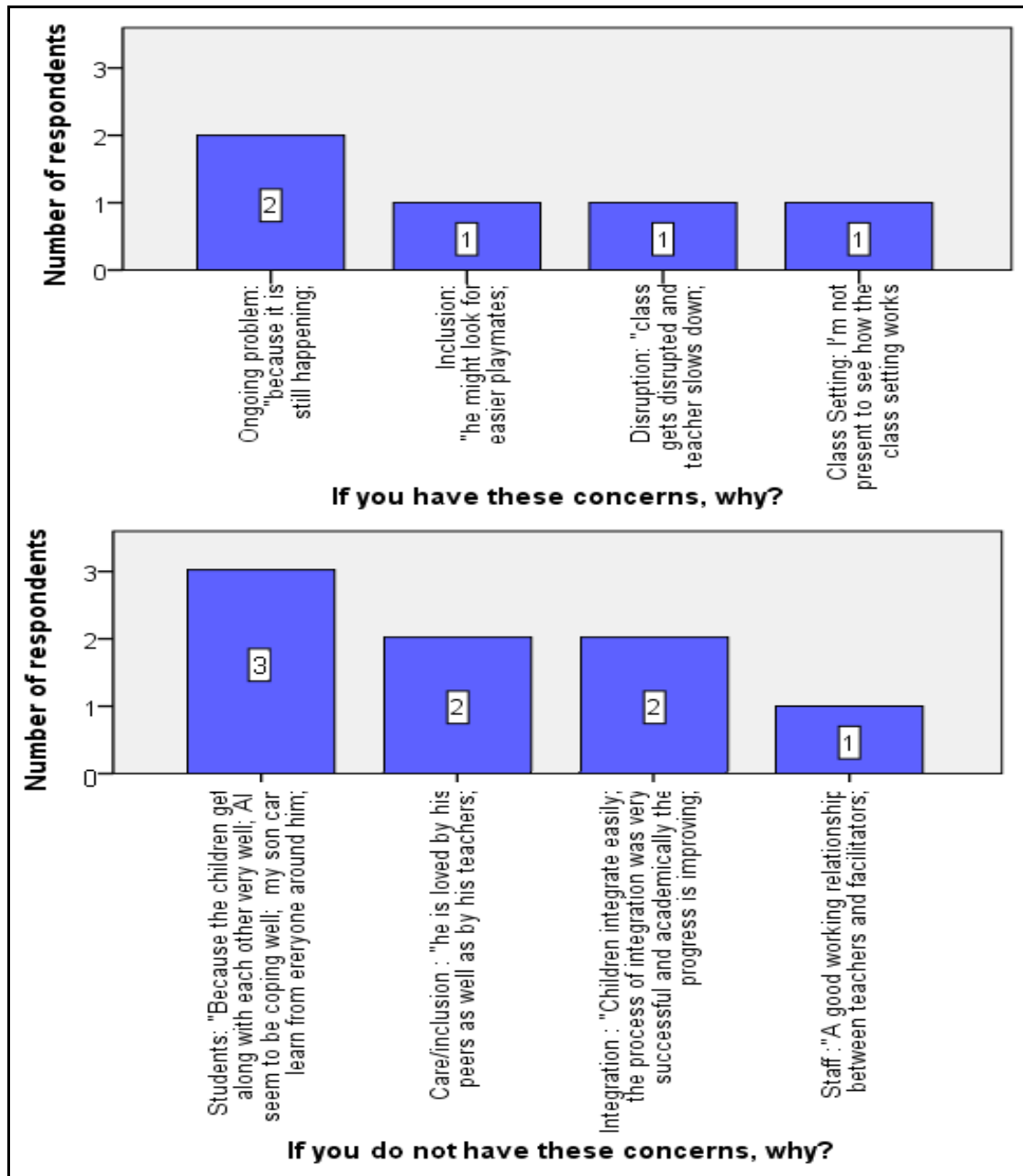


Figure 10  
Rational and realization of parental concerns

In figure 10 the doubts and concerns of these parents included exclusion, disruption, the setting of students and social integration. Most of the parents concerns changed and were not realized with their son's actual school experience and their satisfaction with their educational experience.

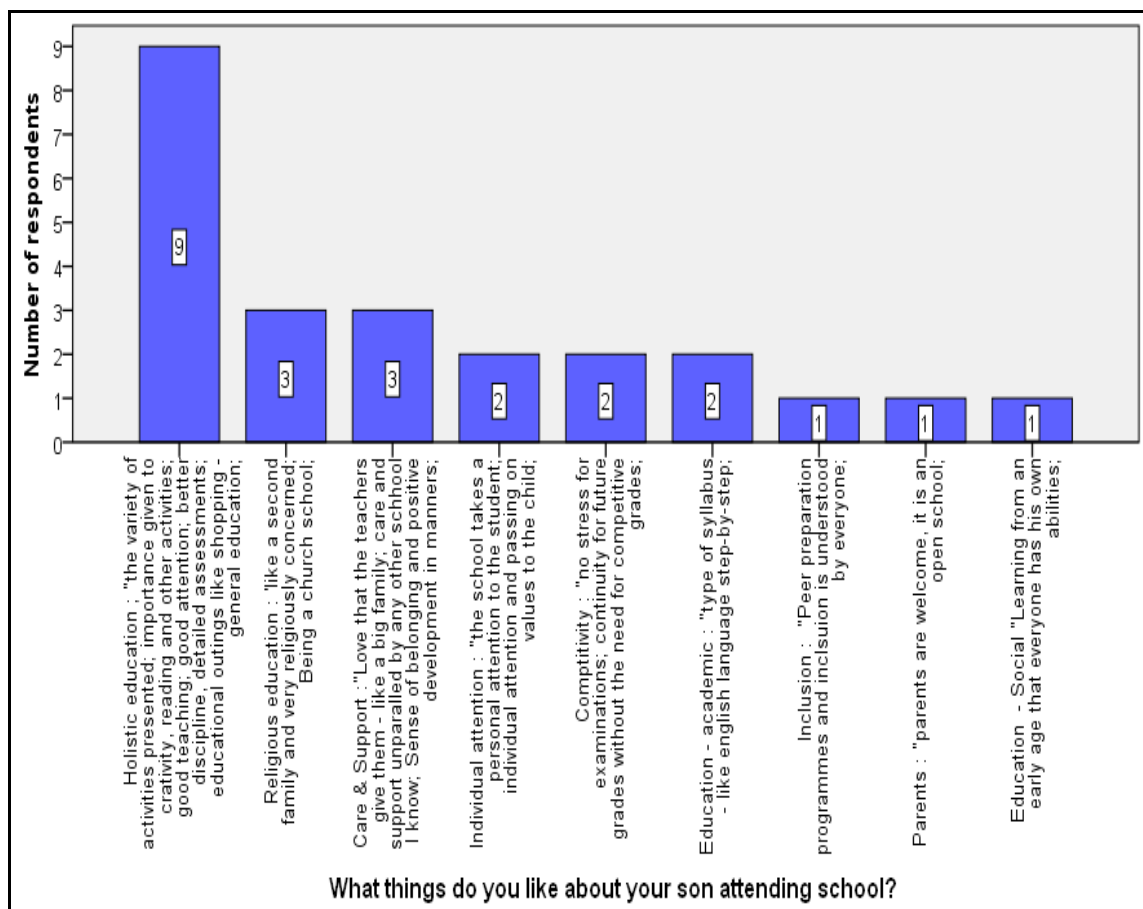


Figure 11  
School qualities perceived by parents

Figure 11 portrays a holistic education to be one of the qualities that the parents like most with regards to the school. Good teaching and discipline were also things the parents liked about the school. The fact that there is continuity and the school is not competitive was also seen as a quality. The care, support and a sense of family and community were also qualities that the parents liked about the school.

In figure 12 statements provided by parents demonstrated that inclusion fostered acceptance and was a natural process. Interestingly, one the comments expressed the salient point that children taught together removes the labeling of disabled students by non-disabled students.

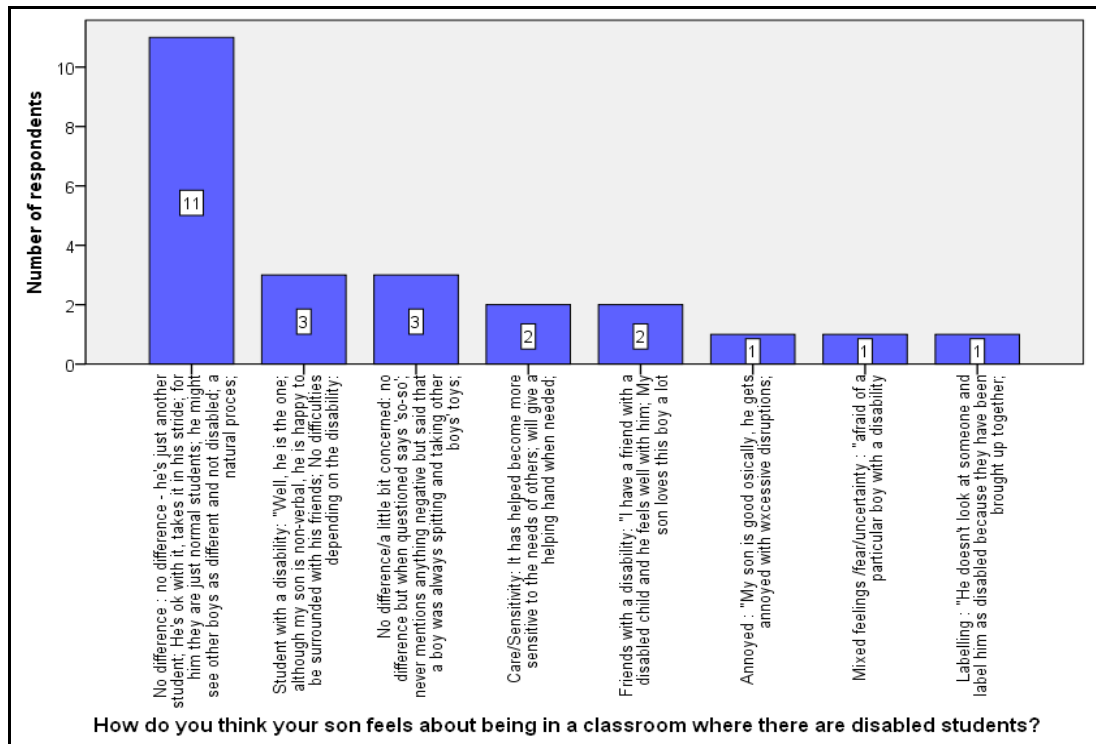


Figure 12  
Parental perception of their son's acceptance of diversity

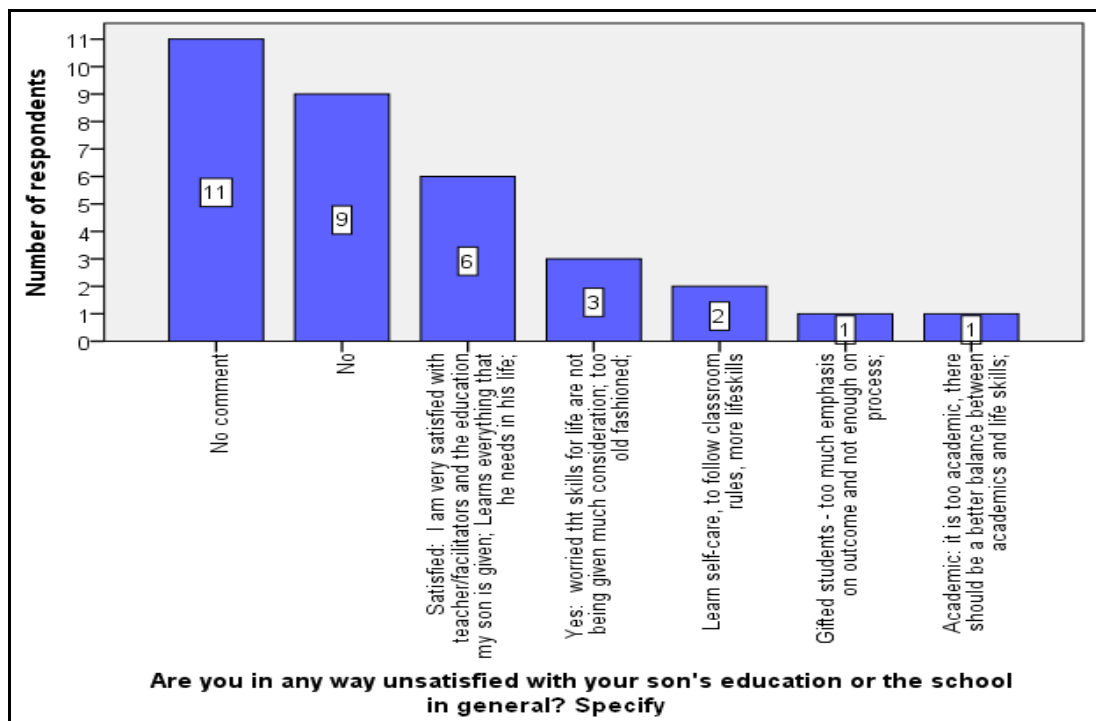


Figure 13  
Parental satisfaction with their son's educational experience

Figure 13 displays that parents, in general, show that they are satisfied with the education their son is receiving. The fact that the school is too academic was a concern for one parent, as was also the teaching of self-care skills. Interestingly, although again only one parent mentioned the gifted student, the emphasis placed on outcomes rather than processes by the school was a sobering thought for educationists and the wider picture of inclusive education.

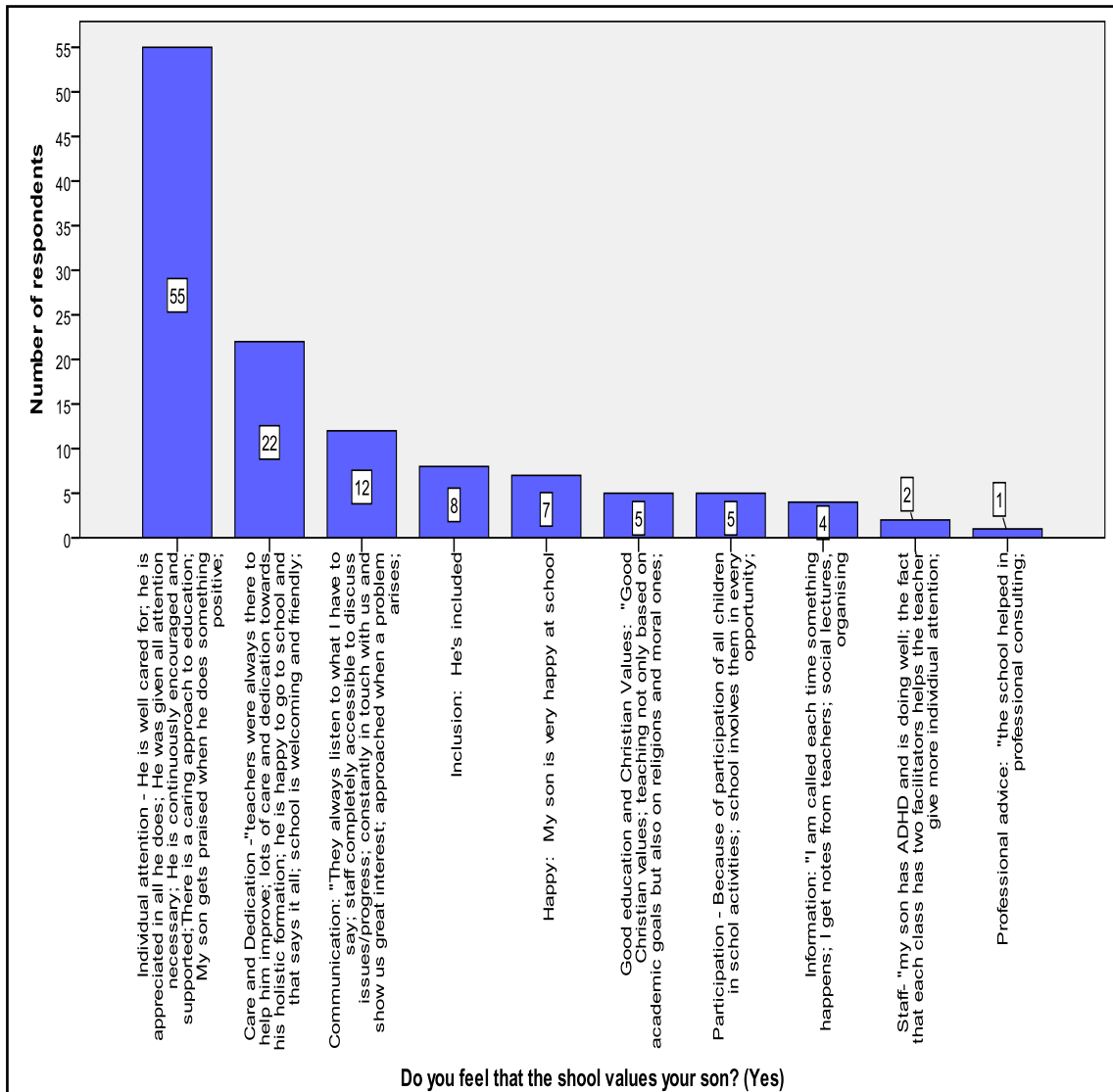


Figure 14  
Respect for students

Qualitative comments by parents displayed in Figure 14 in response to whether they feel that their son/s are valued by the school describes the school as having a positive inclusive school culture and a practice that reflects this culture. Responses that were most common revealed the following qualities: the individual attention given to their sons, the care and appreciation shown towards their sons in everything they achieve, the praise given, and the support that is given when needed. This was followed by care and dedication shown by the teaching staff and the school's welcoming and friendly environment. Being happy at the school, good communication and the availability of the school staff again promotes the school as practicing an inclusive culture. One parent also commented on the professional advice given by the school.

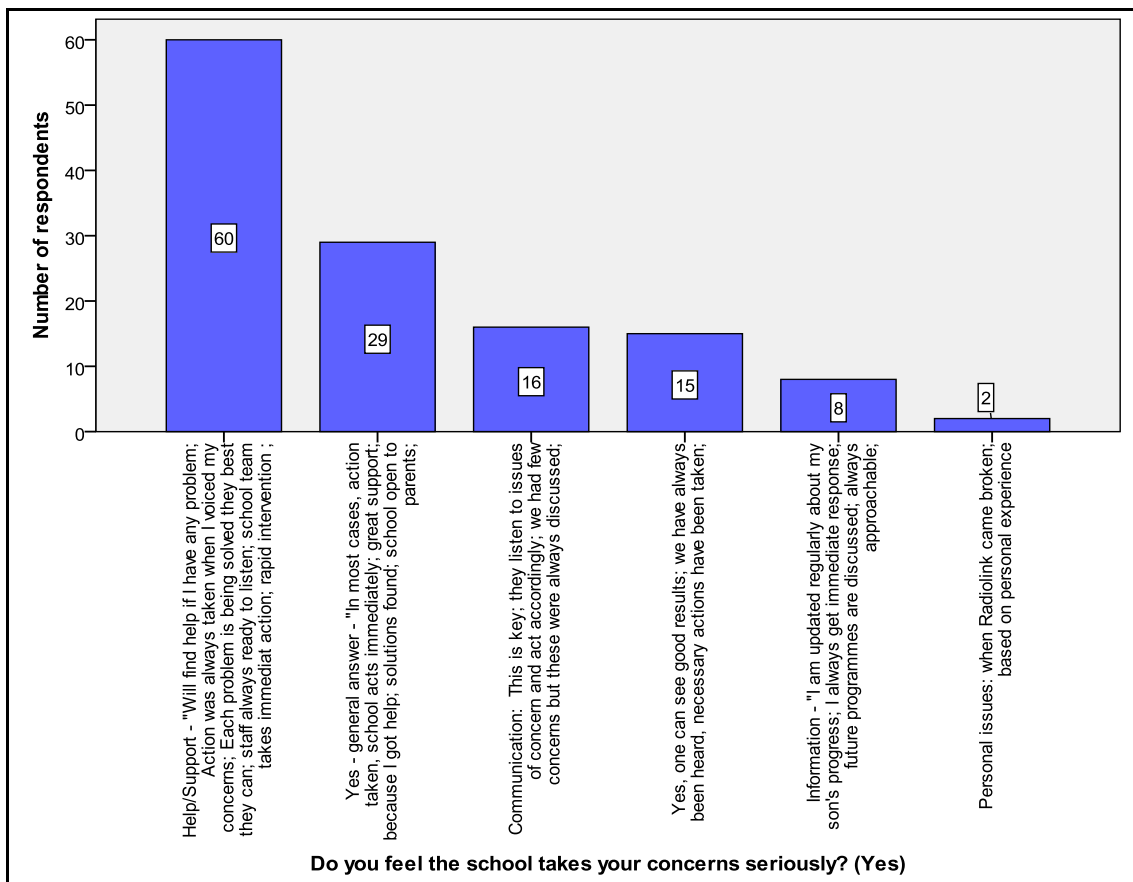


Figure 15  
Positive feedback by parents



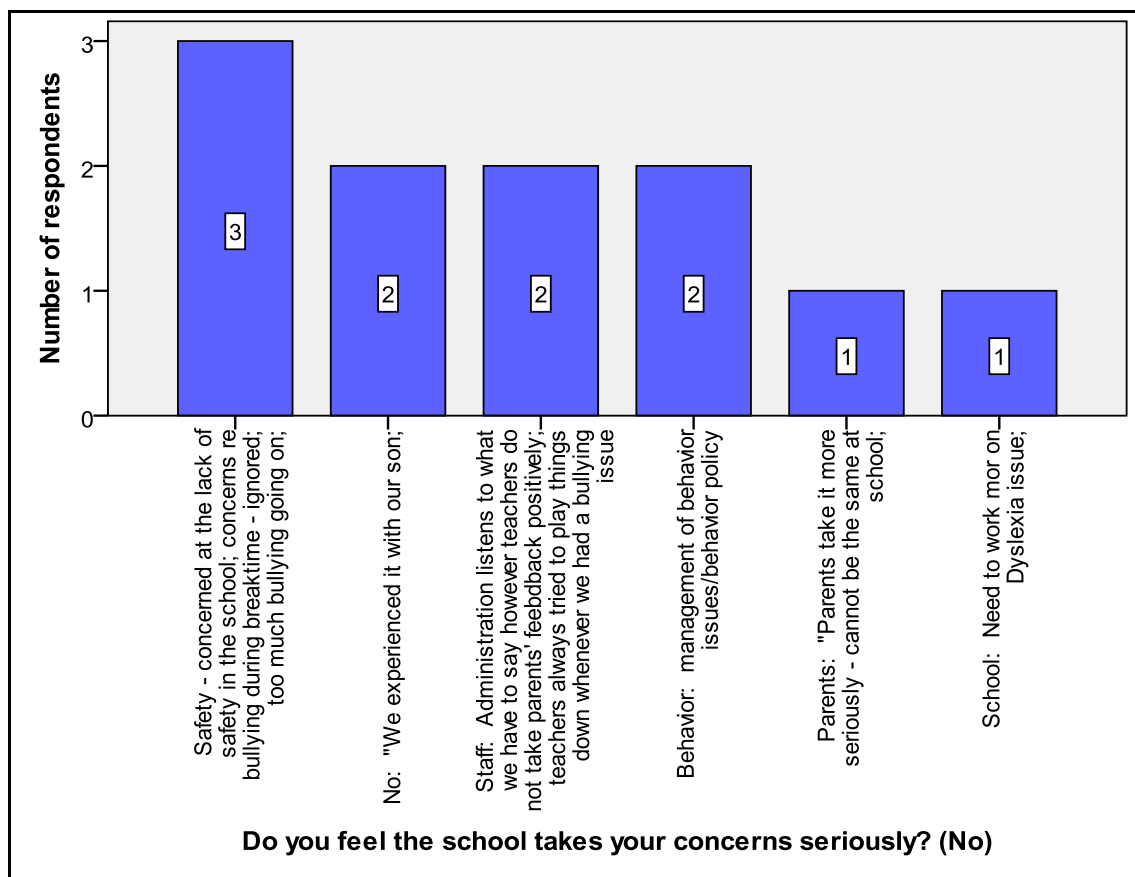


Figure 16  
Negative comments by parents

As displayed in figures 15 and 16, some parents expressed dissatisfaction at the way the school reacted to their concerns. The issues brought up were bullying, safety issue and behaviour. One parent felt the need for better provisions for the dyslexic student. There were many positive comments about not only the administration listening to parental concerns but also about its acting with immediacy. However, a few parents felt that sometimes teachers did not take their feedback in a constructive way.

Figure 17 display parents' perceived concerns and actual concerns regarding inclusion in the classroom. Parents had more concerns prior to the experience. The majority of parents were convinced that inclusion was a

positive experience prior to their son attending the school. The major concerns were curriculum, behaviour and teachers' ability to cope with diversity in the classroom. However, the majority of parents did not have any concerns following their sons' inclusive experience.

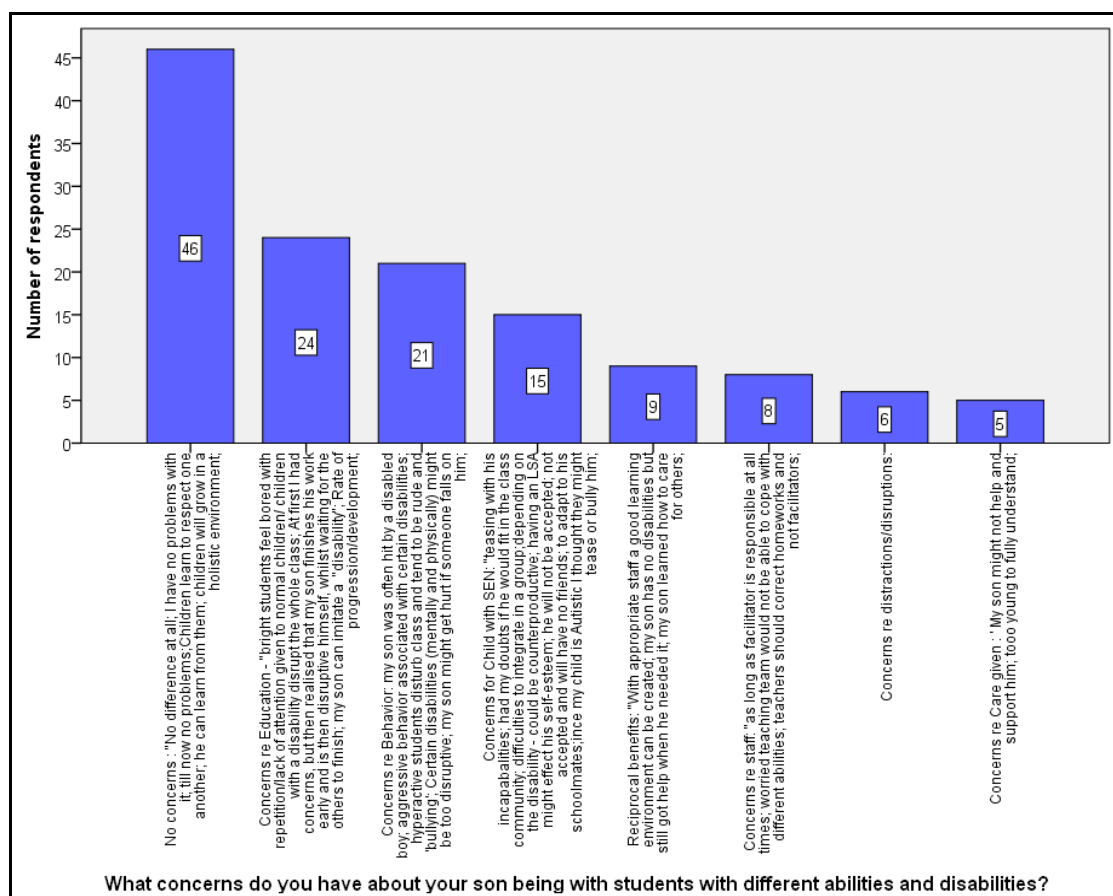


Figure 17  
Past parents' concerns regarding mixed ability classes

Figure 18 displays parents' comments about including/excluding disabled students. Many parents demonstrated a positive attitude to including disabled students alongside non-disabled students. Whilst parents supported including disabled students within the school, some of their comments revealed that a few parents still had their reservations. These reservations were around the type and severity of disability and the number of disabled students in a class. Figure 19

explores further the views of those parents who feel that disabled students should not attend a mainstream school. Their concerns were about the effects on the learning of the non-disabled students and the lowering of educational standards. The perceived lack of knowledge and instructional skills of teachers, together with a lack of resources and equipment that are thought to be necessary and only found in special schools, was also given as a reason for excluding disabled students.

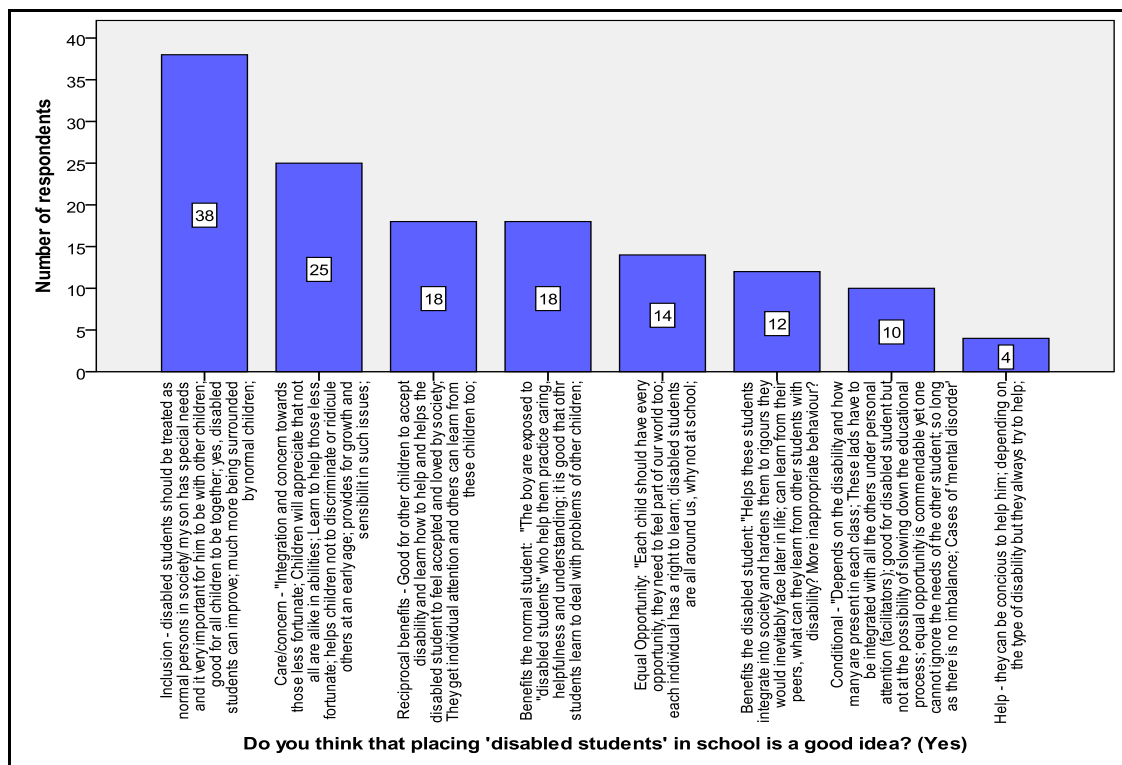


Figure 18  
Including disabled students

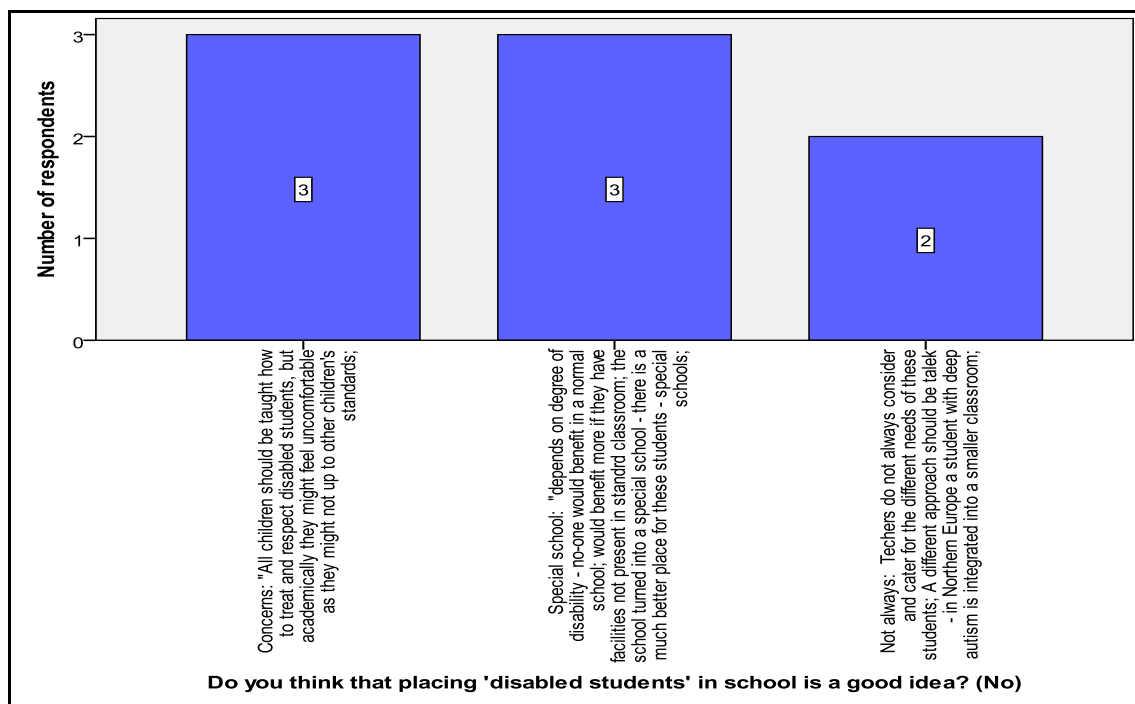


Figure 19  
Excluding disabled students

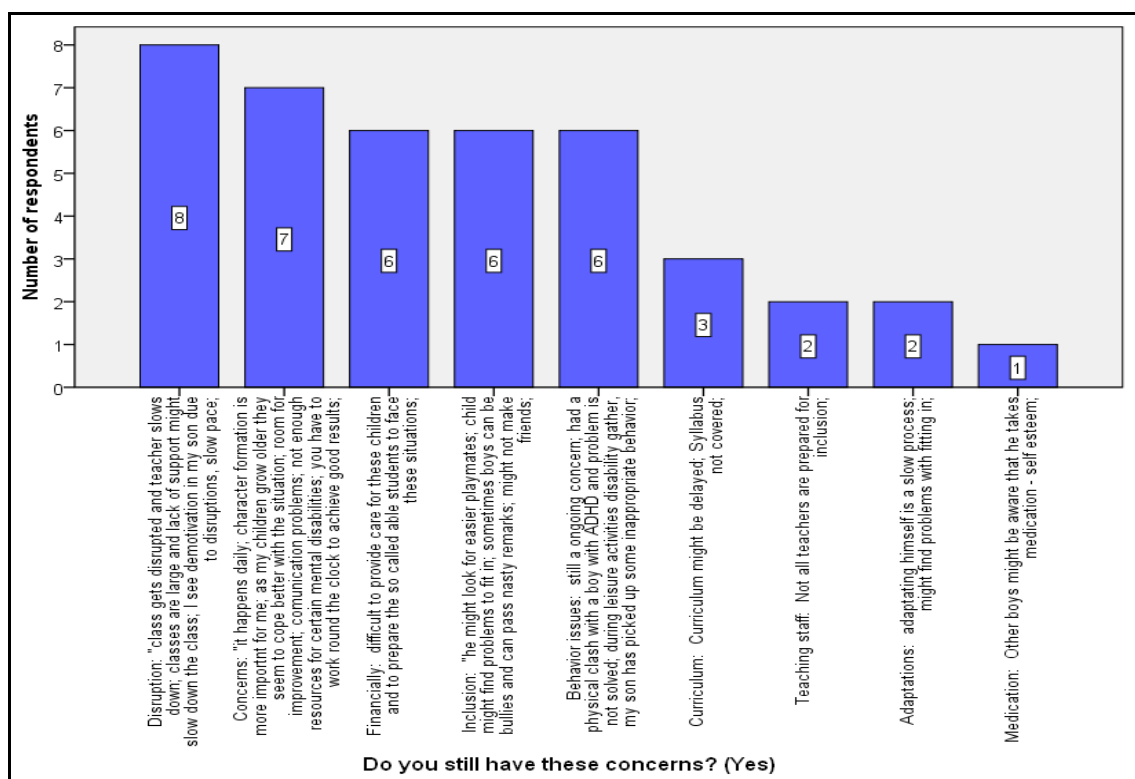


Figure 20  
Reasons for parents having concerns regarding mixed ability classrooms

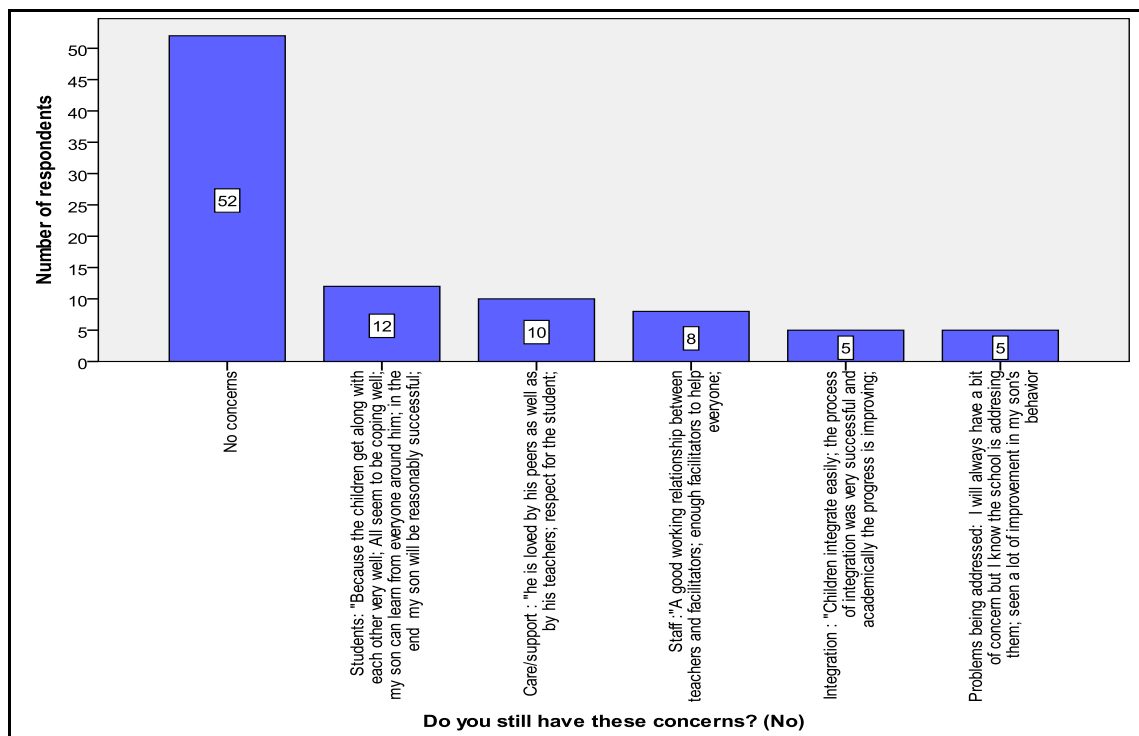


Figure 21  
Reasons for parents not having concerns regarding mixed ability classrooms

Figures 20 and 21 display parents' perceived and actual concerns regarding mixed ability classrooms. Parents had more concerns prior to the experience. The majority of parents were convinced that inclusion was a positive experience prior to their son attending the school. The major concerns were curriculum, behaviour and teachers' ability to cope with diversity in the classroom. However, the majority of parents did not have any concerns following their sons' inclusive experience.

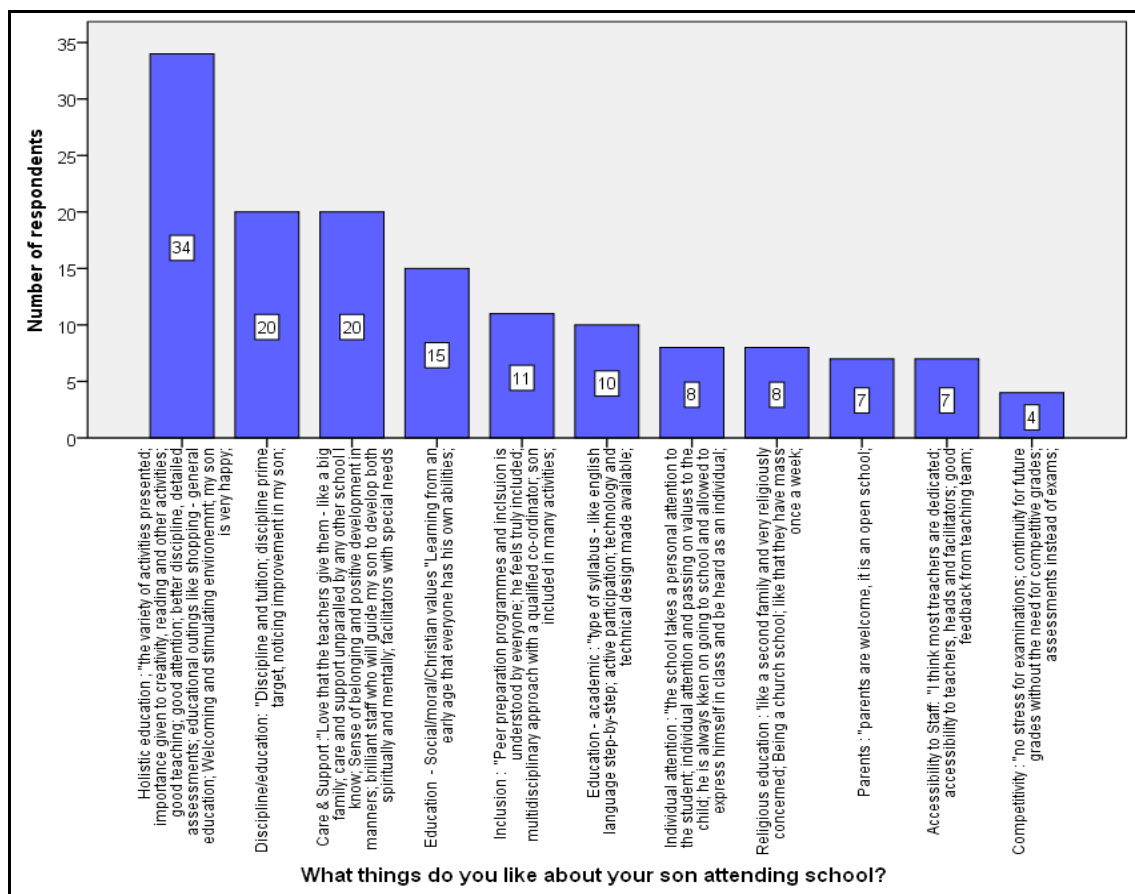


Figure 22  
What parents like about the school

The majority of parents in figure 22 appreciate the importance given to a holistic education. They also specifically referred to the social, emotional, moral and educational strengths of the school. They also appreciated the importance given to character formation supported by the preparation strategies given for inclusion. Four parents were satisfied with the assessment procedures in place and seven parents confirmed that the school had a welcoming environment and practices an open door policy.

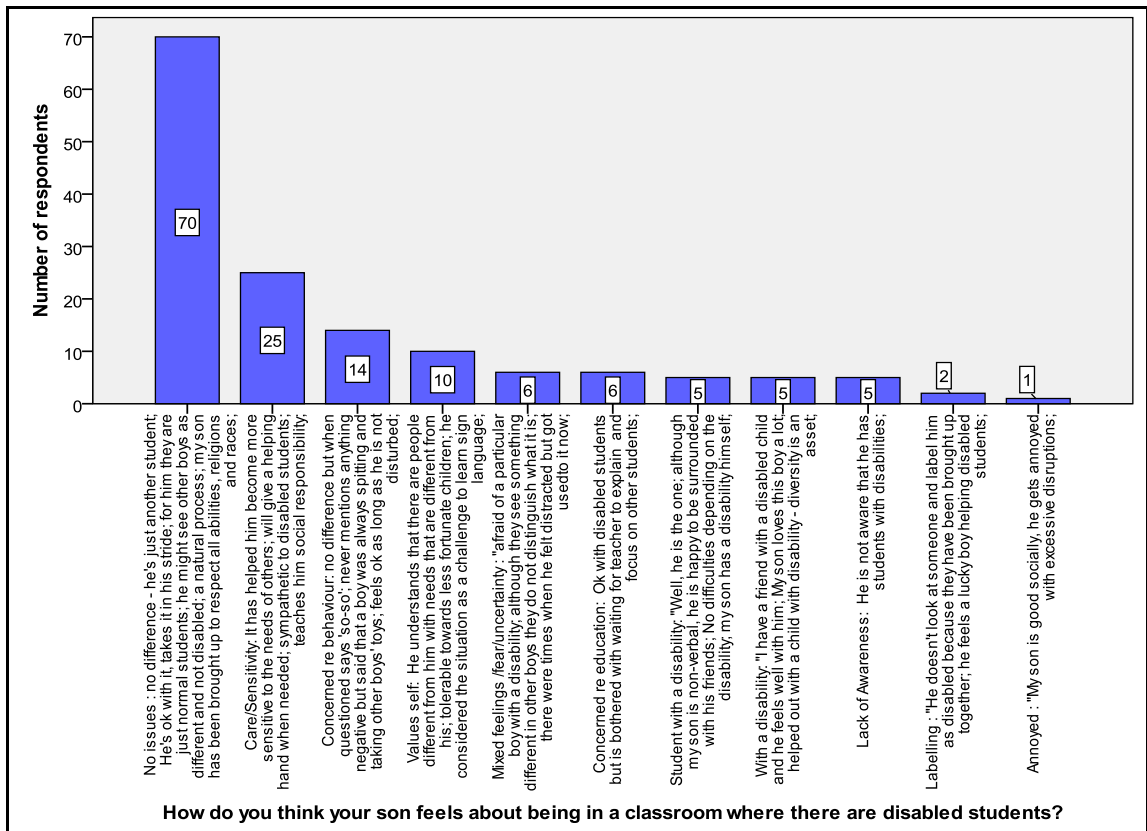


Figure 23  
Students' feelings about inclusion according to parents

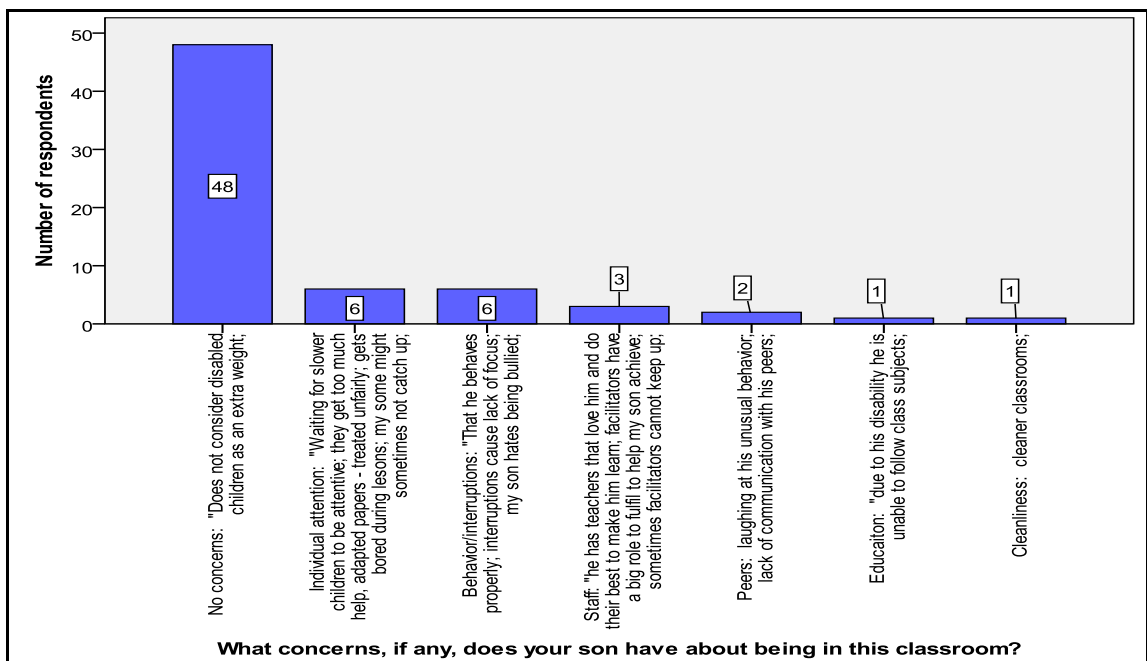


Figure 24  
Students' concerns about inclusion according to parents

In figure 23 parents perceive their sons' interaction with disabled students as an experience of growth as well as a preparation for life. They also feel it makes their sons more caring individuals. Only one parent commented negatively on issues of disruption.

Figure 24 displays concerns perceived by a small minority of the parents that their sons may have in an inclusive classroom are again about curriculum, behaviour and teasing. Parents suggested in figure 25 the following ways of addressing these concerns: more disability awareness, communication between parents and teachers, conditional inclusion.

The parents' concept of inclusion within the school, displayed in figure 26, elicited that in general parents understand the concept of inclusion. The parents' comments were based upon inclusive principles, such as children of all abilities and capabilities learning together in the same classroom. Allowing for children of all abilities to learn and to play together was also mentioned. Parents also referred to equal opportunities, the school being a place for everyone, tolerance of difference, and parent involvement, being part and parcel of inclusive education. Individual education programmes and accessibility were commented upon by parents of disabled students. Five parents made a comment that does not tie in with the philosophy of inclusion, and that was 'partial' inclusion. Again this was a comment passed by parents of disabled students. These parents might well feel that their sons would benefit by more individual support.



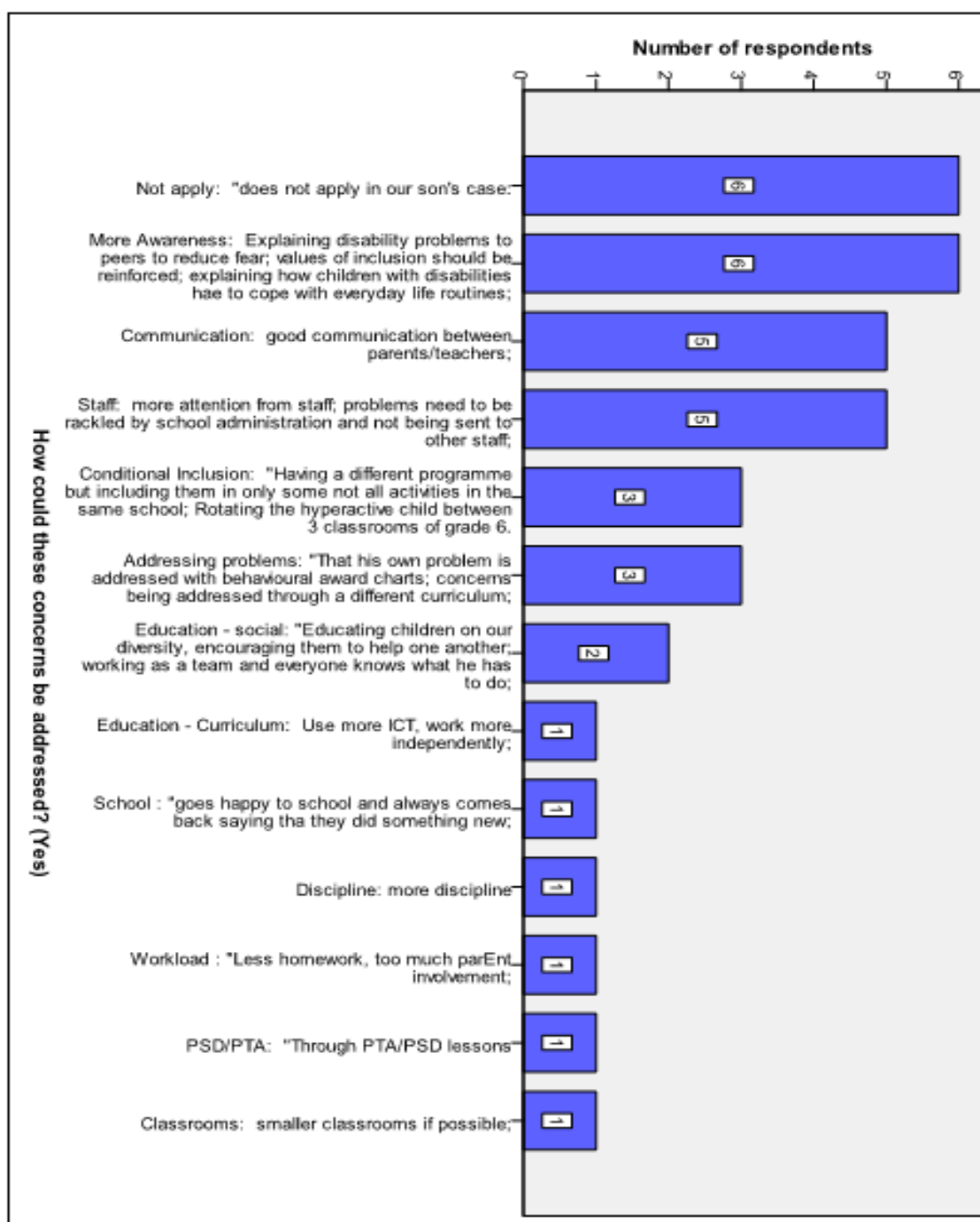


Figure 25  
Parents' suggestions of how to address students' concerns vis-à-vis inclusion

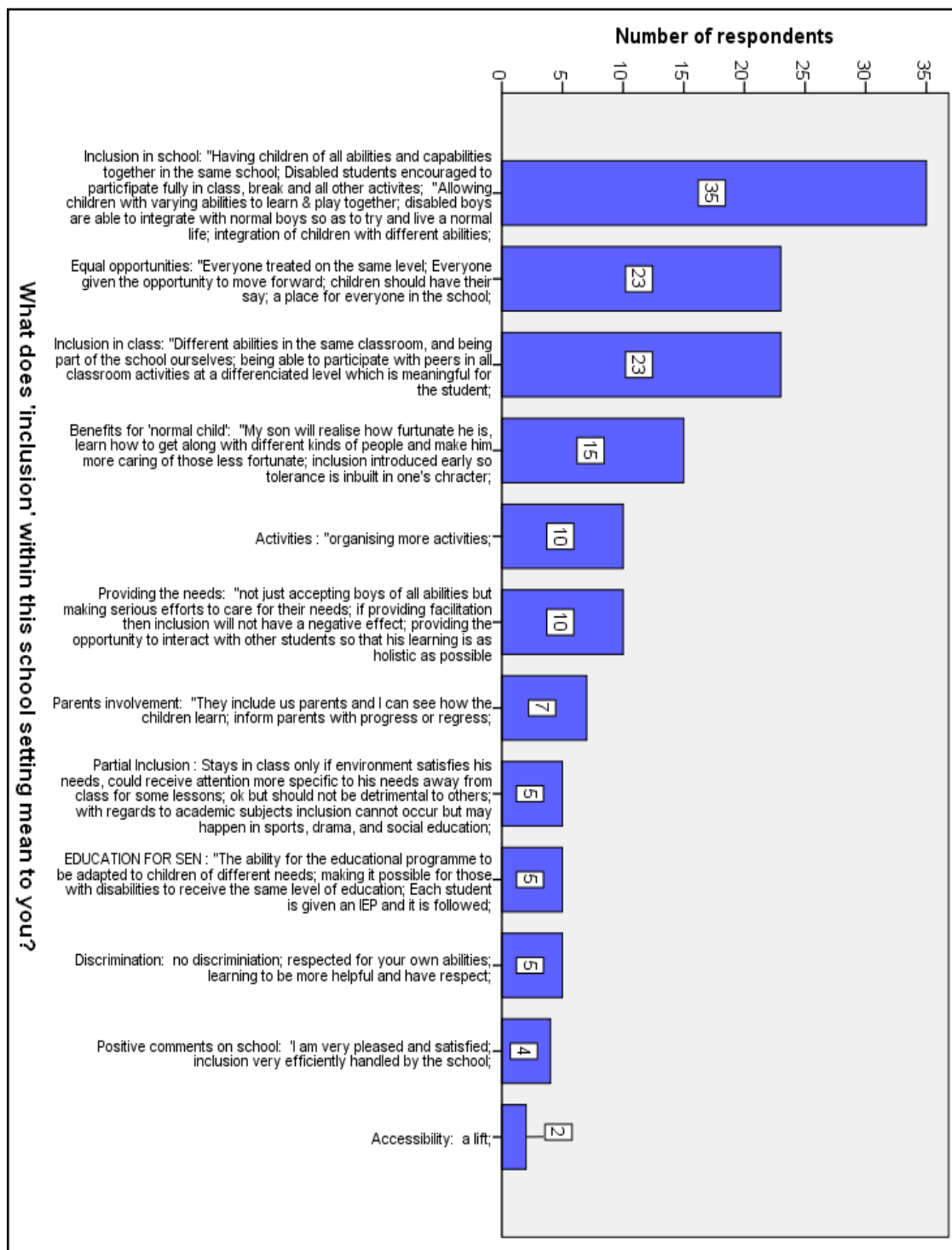


Figure 26  
Parents' concept of inclusive education

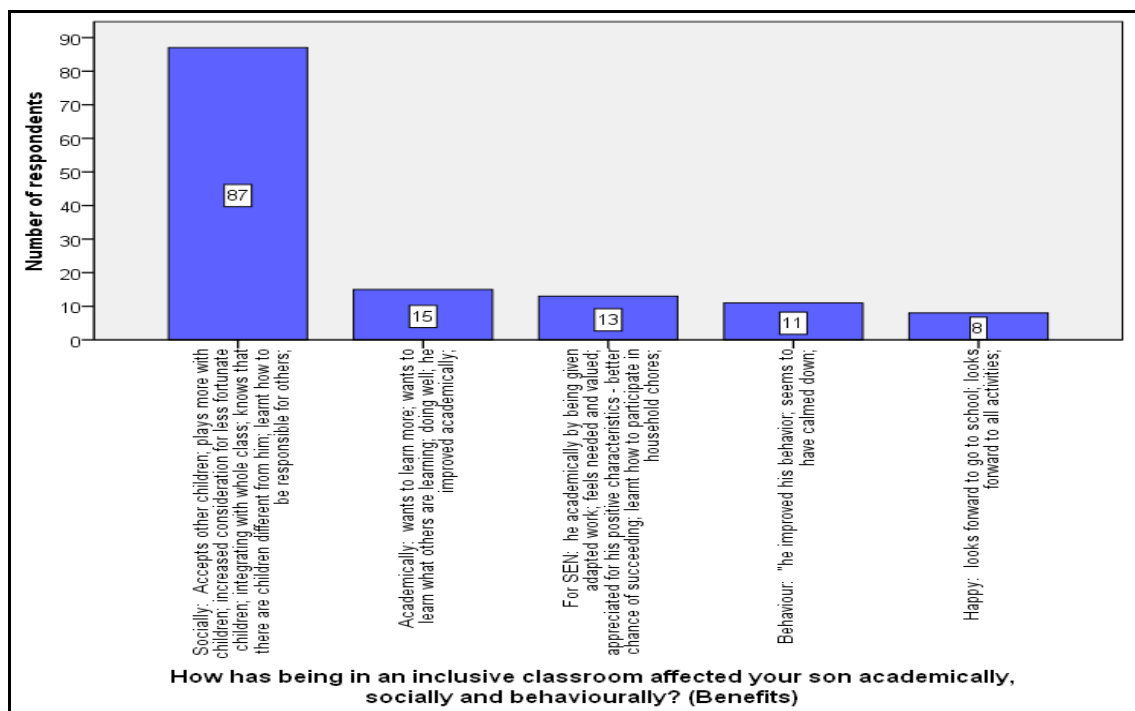


Figure 27  
Benefits of inclusion

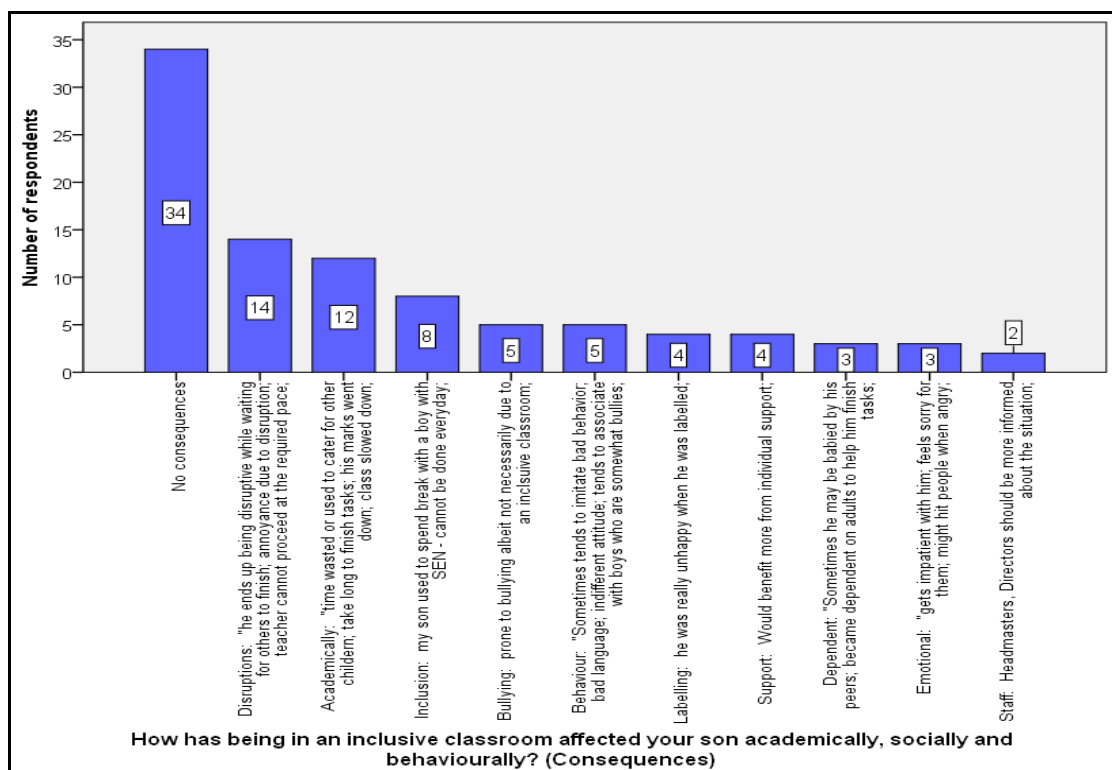


Figure 28  
Consequences of inclusion

Figures 27 and 28 display both the benefits and the consequences parents have encountered regarding inclusion as practiced by the school. Parents commented on the dedication of the teaching teams, and on the way the teaching teams take responsibility for the class as a whole. Parents also mentioned educational opportunities, children learning from each other, acceptance, good communication and continuity of learning between home and school, and tailored educational programmes. The consequences mentioned by the parents were again class disruptions, wasting of time, slowing down of curriculum, and the negative language that is used by some teachers.

Parents' suggestions in figures 29 to 32 on how they envisage inclusion in the future were both constructive and realistic. Parents appreciated the inclusive experience and recommended that all children in Malta should have the same experience. However, they felt that the number of disabled students placed in classes should be more representative of the general population. Parents would like to see the experience of inclusive practice in the Junior School continue into and throughout the Secondary School. They were satisfied with the inclusive practice of the school and felt that any improvements should be based on what was already in place. Parents also felt that more parent participation in the decision making processes of the school would improve the inclusive experience. Some parents also commented on the importance of group work, contextual learning, computer assisted learning, and a more child-centred pedagogy. More programmes in schools on disability awareness for students, teachers and parents was another recommendation made by parents.

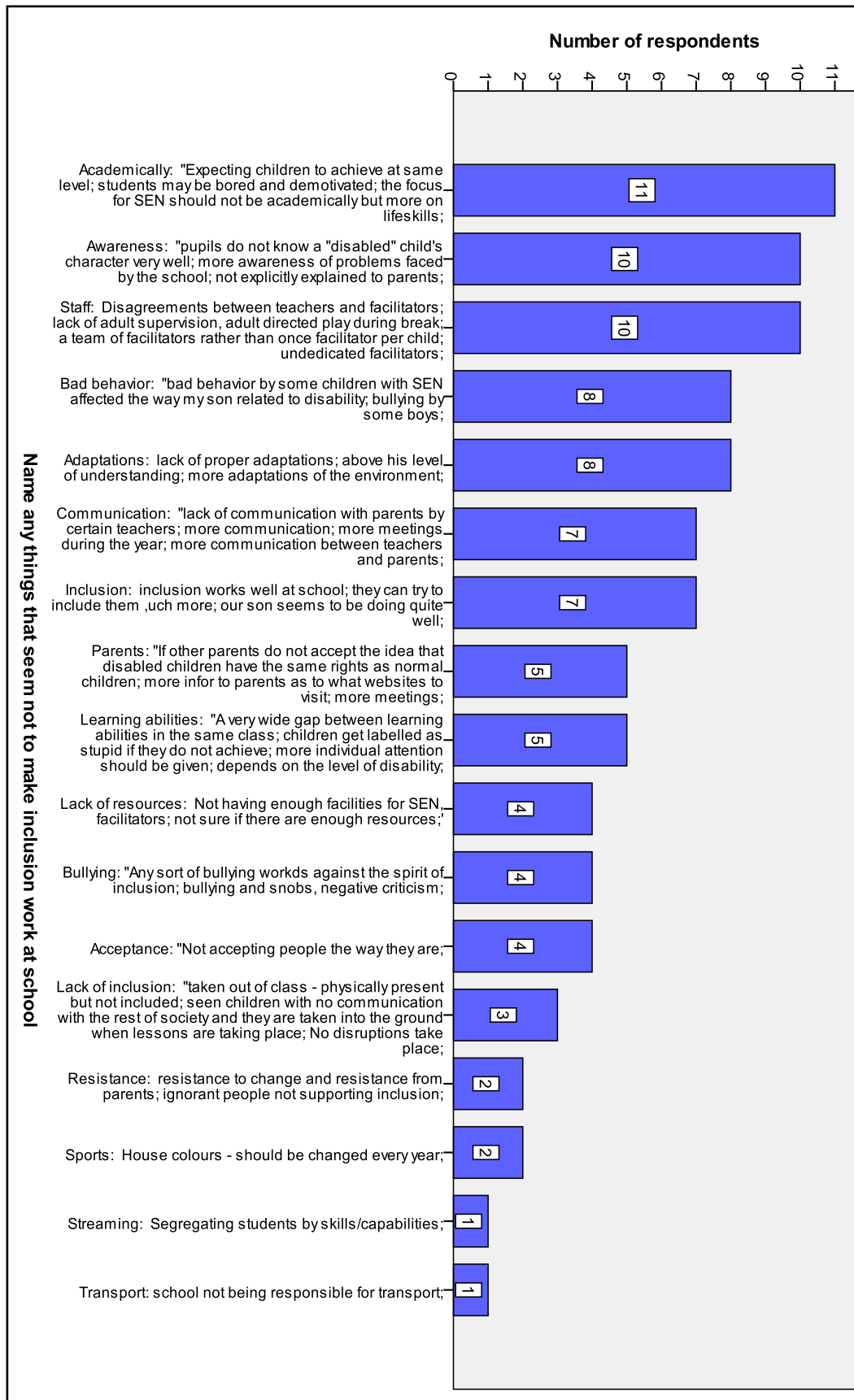
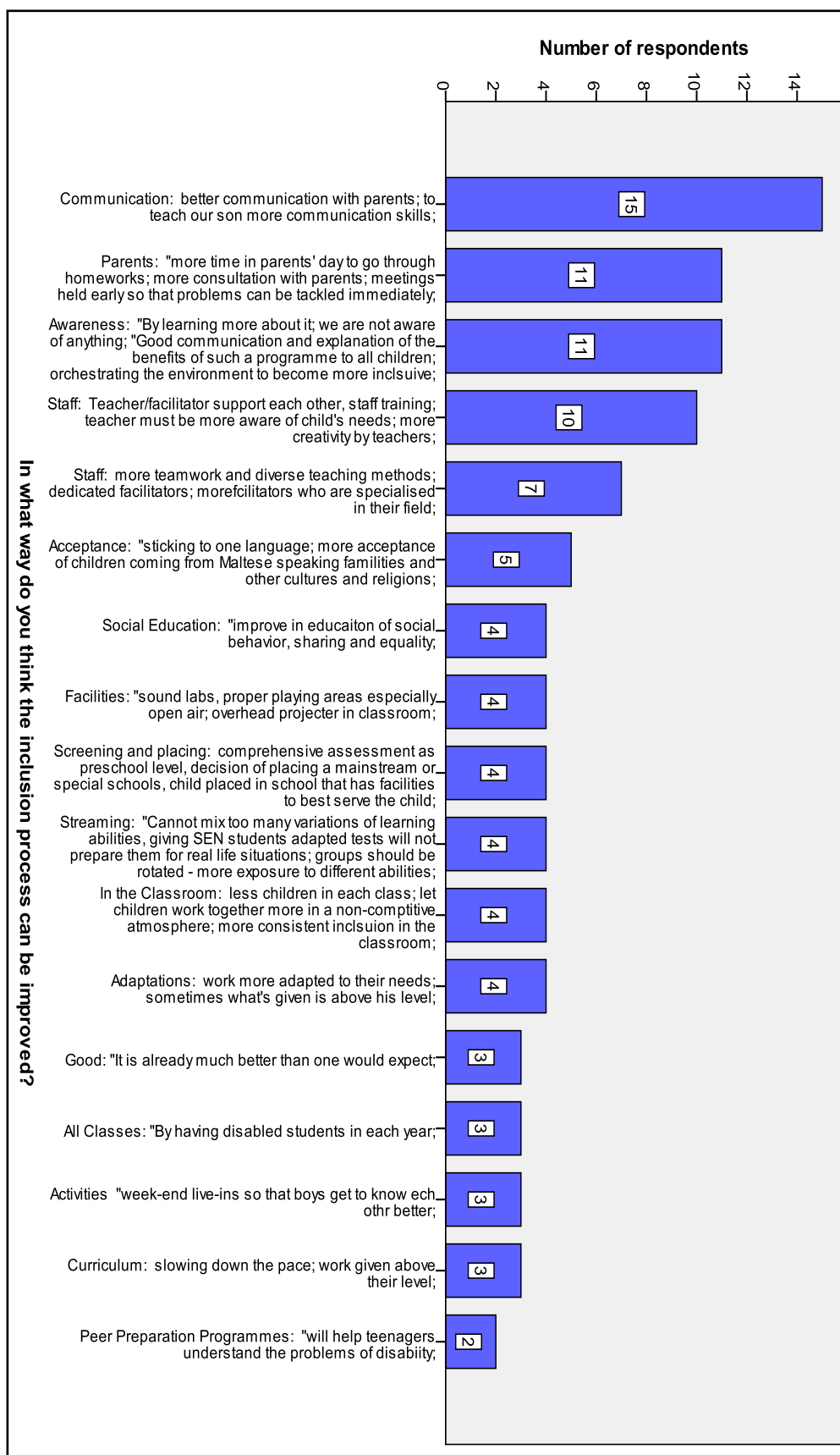


Figure 29  
Barriers to inclusion



**Figure 30**  
Improvements perceived by parents as needed

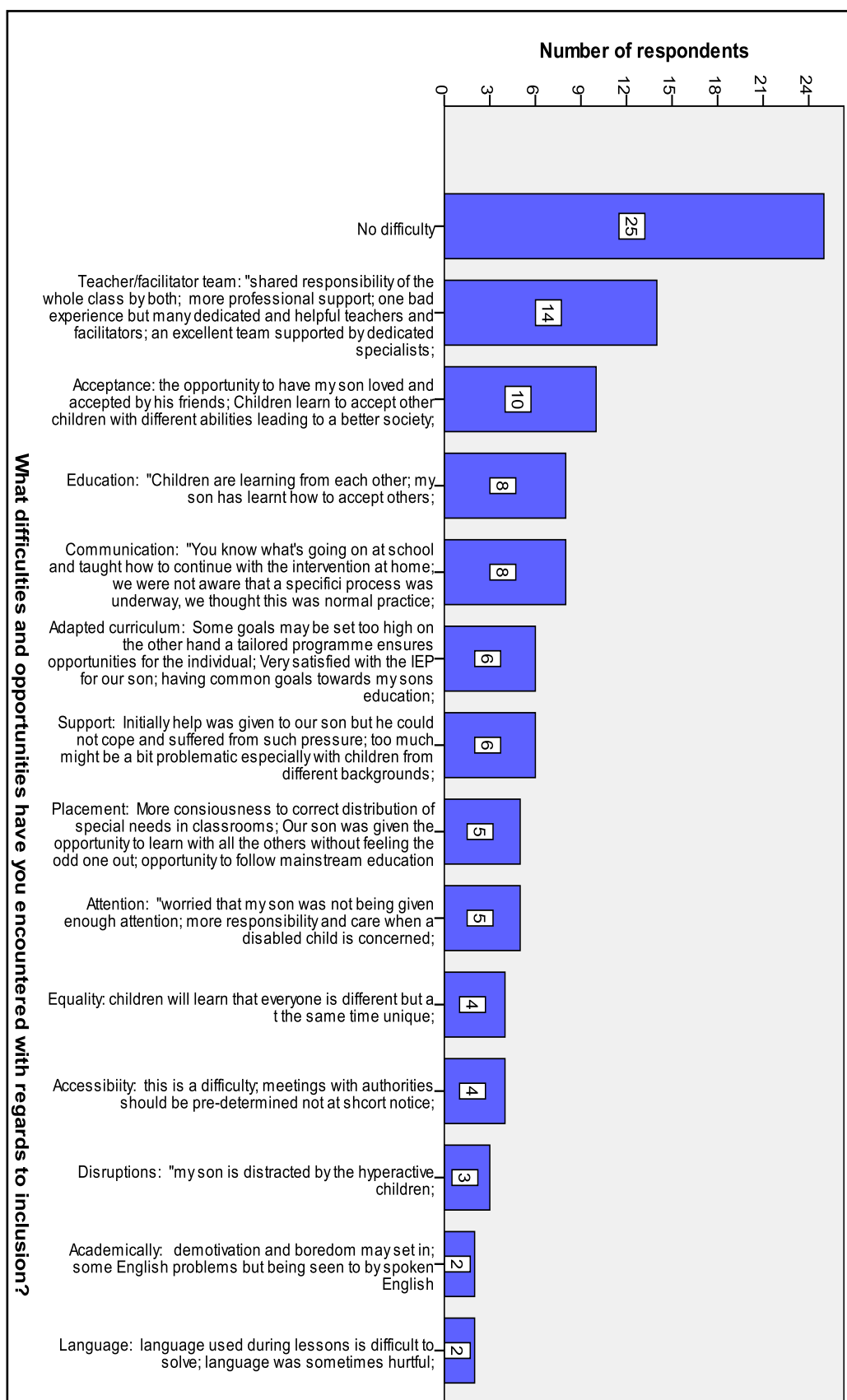
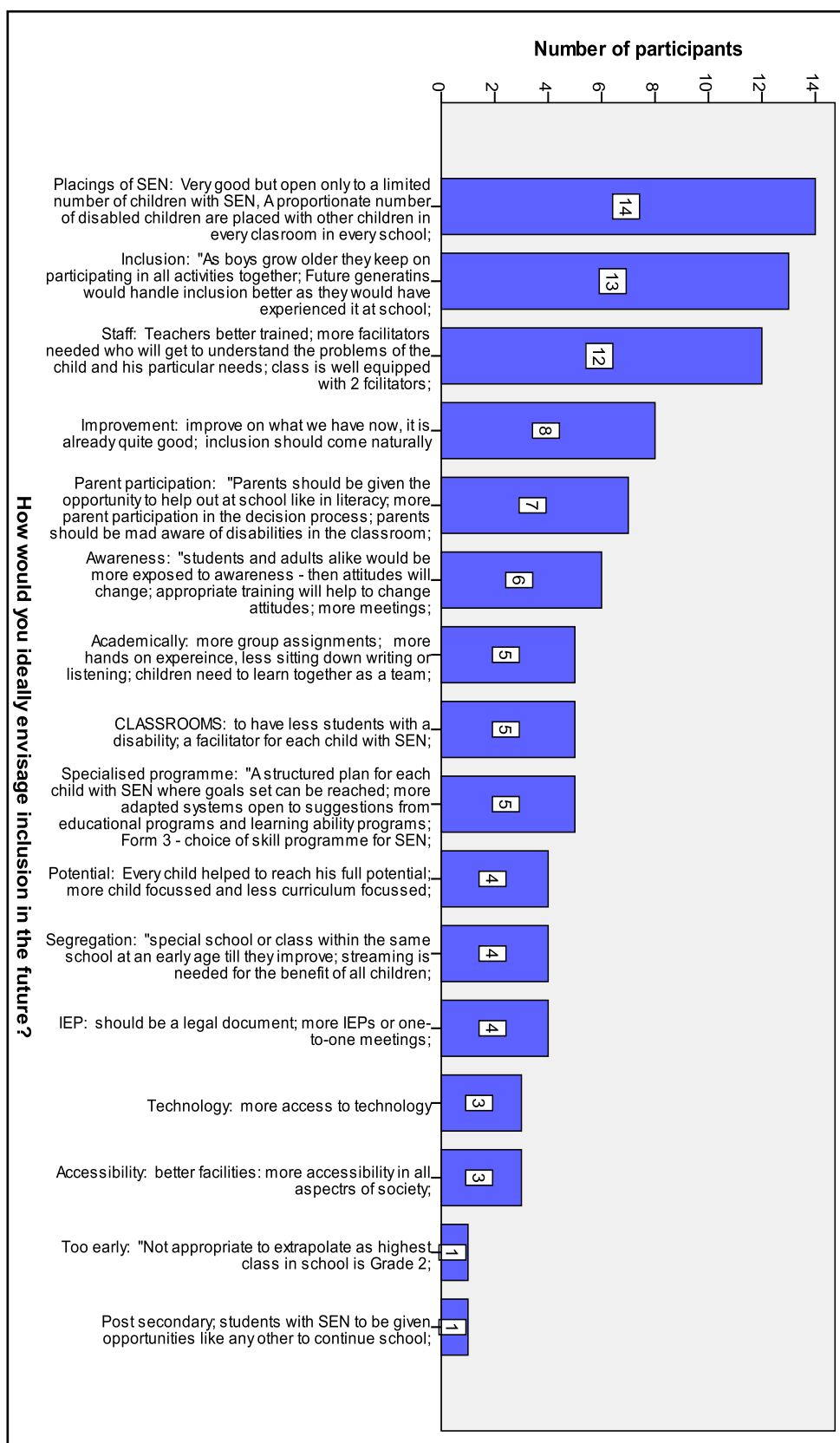


Figure 31  
Experienced opportunities and difficulties



**Figure 32**  
**Inclusive practice in the future**



## Data Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire

Teachers' responses were analyzed mainly through crosstabs and descriptive tables.

Table 18

Crosstab displaying percentages of teachers as to whether they observe students' understanding of concepts by monitoring their understanding of directions and assigned tasks

I allow time to monitor the students' understanding of directions and assigned tasks	I observe students' understanding of concepts presented in class				Total
	I have arrived	I am working on this	I do not believe this possible	I am not prepared to deal with this	
I have arrived	56.8%	11.4%	0.0%	0.0%	68.2%
I am working on this	0.0%	29.5%	0.0%	0.0%	29.5%
I do not believe this is possible	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	0.0%	2.3%
I am not prepared to deal with this	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	56.8%	40.9%	2.3%	0.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 70.48, v = 4, p < 0.0005$$

Table 18 shows that 68.2% of teachers stated they allow time for monitoring students' understanding of directions and assigned tasks; 29.5% of teachers stipulated that they are working towards this end, and the remaining 2.3% said they do not believe this to be attainable. Moreover, 56.8% stated they observe students understanding of concepts taught in class; 40.9% of teachers replied that they were working towards this reflective practice, and 2.3% believed that this was not possible. Interestingly, 88.6% of the teachers retained similar replies to both statements; however, 11.4% of them felt more comfortable allocating time to monitoring students' understanding rather than observing students' understanding of concepts.

Table 19

Crosstab displaying percentages of teachers by their perception of whether they provide individual instruction for students as needed

I allow time to monitor the students' understanding of directions and assigned tasks	I provide individual instruction for students as needed				Total
	I have arrived	I am working on this	I do not believe this is possible	I am not prepared to deal with this	
I have arrived	15.9%	34.1%	15.9%	6.8%	72.7%
I am working on this	6.8%	9.1%	6.8%	2.3%	25.0%
I do not believe this possible	0.0%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%
I am not prepared to deal with this	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	22.7%	45.5%	22.7%	9.1%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 1.638, v = 6, p = 0.950$$

Table 19 shows that only 22.7% of teachers stated that they provided individual instruction for students' when required; 31.8% of teachers displayed no intention to provide individual instruction because they did not believe this was possible. The remaining 45.5% said that they were working towards this practice. The p-value (0.950) indicates that irrespective of the response teachers gave to allocating time to monitor their students' understanding of directions and assigned tasks, a large proportion of them do provide individual instruction for their students as needed.

Table 20

Crosstab displaying percentages of teachers' perception of whether they provide individual instruction to students by their observations of students' understanding

I observe students' understanding of concepts presented in class	I provide individual instruction for students as needed				Total
	I have arrived	I am working on this	I do not believe this possible	I am not prepared to deal with this	
I have arrived	14.3%	26.2%	11.9%	7.1%	59.5%
I am working on this	7.1%	19.0%	9.5%	2.4%	38.1%
I do not believe this possible	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
I am not prepared to deal with this	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	21.4%	47.6%	21.4%	9.5%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 1.779, v = 6, p = 0.939$$

Table 20 shows that 59.5% of teachers said that they took note of their students' understanding of concepts taught in class; 2.4% stated that it was not

possible to observe students learning and the remaining 38.1% were working towards it. The p-value (0.939) indicates that, irrespectively of the response teachers gave to the students' understanding of concepts taught, a large proportion of them do provide individual instruction for their students as needed.

Table 21

Table displaying the percentages of teachers by their perceptions and attitudes

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
I respect students with disabilities as individuals with differences as I respect all children in my classroom	I have arrived	40	85.1
	I am working on this	6	12.8
	I do not believe this possible	1	2.1
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I am aware of the individual capabilities of students and adapt accordingly	I have arrived	16	34.0
	I am working on this	31	66.0
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I establish routines appropriate for students with disabilities (establish settings so children know what is consistently expected)	I have arrived	11	24.4
	I am working on this	33	73.3
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I employ classroom management strategies that are effective with students with disabilities (e.g., time out, point systems, etc.)	I have arrived	17	37.8
	I am working on this	21	46.7
	I do not believe this possible	4	8.9
	I am not prepared to deal with this	3	6.7
I consciously provide reinforcement and encouragement (e.g., encourage effort, provide support if the student gets discouraged, emphasizing positive gains	I have arrived	41	87.2
	I am working on this	6	12.8
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I attempt to determine student interests and strengths, and connect personally with students	I have arrived	27	57.4
	I am working on this	20	42.6
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I help students of all abilities learn to find appropriate avenues to express feelings and needs (drawings, sign language, time outs, etc.)	I have arrived	9	20.0
	I am working on this	33	73.3
	I do not believe this possible	3	6.7
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I am comfortable communicating with students with disabilities (plan frequent, short, one-on-one conferences, discuss potential modifications).	I have arrived	18	39.1
	I am working on this	25	54.3
	I do not believe this possible	2	4.3
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I am comfortable communicating with the special education teacher (e.g., write notes back and forth, talk informally, collaborate during allotted prep time)	I have arrived	32	68.1
	I am working on this	14	29.8
	I do not believe this possible	1	2.1
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
I communicate with parents of students with or without disabilities (e.g., write notes back and forth, talk informally)	I have arrived	24	52.2
	I am working on this	19	41.3
	I do not believe this possible	2	4.3
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I expect the best from all students in the classroom and am aware of their capabilities	I have arrived	33	70.2
	I am working on this	14	29.8
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I am able to make adaptations for students when developing long-range (yearly/unit) plans (e.g., realistic long-term objectives)	I have arrived	14	30.4
	I am working on this	26	56.5
	I do not believe this possible	6	13.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I consciously make adaptations for students when planning daily activities, being aware of potential problems before they occur	I have arrived	16	34.0
	I am working on this	28	59.6
	I do not believe this possible	2	4.3
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.1
I plan assignments and activities that allow students with and without disabilities to be successful (structure assignments to reduce frustration)	I have arrived	18	38.3
	I am working on this	25	53.2
	I do not believe this possible	3	6.4
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.1
I strive to allot time for teaching successful strategies as well as content material (test-taking skills, note-taking skills)	I have arrived	10	21.7
	I am working on this	31	67.4
	I do not believe this possible	4	8.7
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I adjust the physical arrangements of room for students with disabilities (modify seating arrangements, provide space for movement).	I have arrived	33	71.7
	I am working on this	10	21.7
	I do not believe this possible	2	4.3
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I construct study guides, tape record readings, and hands-on activities for classroom members	I have arrived	14	31.8
	I am working on this	26	59.1
	I do not believe this possible	3	6.8
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.3
I am able to use alternative materials for learners (variety of textbooks, supplemental readers, calculators)	I have arrived	24	52.2
	I am working on this	17	37.0
	I do not believe this possible	4	8.7
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I encourage students to use computers for word processing or skill development	I have arrived	27	60.0
	I am working on this	16	35.6
	I do not believe this possible	1	2.2
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I allow time to monitor the students' understanding of directions and assigned tasks	I have arrived	33	70.2
	I am working on this	13	27.7
	I do not believe this possible	1	2.1
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
I observe students' understanding of concepts presented in class (attend to, comment on and reinforce understanding of vocabulary, abstract ideas, key words)	I have arrived	25	56.8
	I am working on this	18	40.9
	I do not believe this possible	1	2.3
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I provide individual instruction for students as needed (plan for one-to-one sessions after school, allocate time for individual instruction during class)	I have arrived	10	22.7
	I am working on this	20	45.5
	I do not believe this possible	10	22.7
	I am not prepared to deal with this	4	9.1
I pair students of all abilities with peers to assist with assignments, projects, provide role models for behaviour, academics and social interaction	I have arrived	22	48.9
	I am working on this	22	48.9
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I involve students in active learning and in cooperative learning groups of mixed abilities	I have arrived	26	57.8
	I am working on this	19	42.2
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I encourage students of all abilities to participate in whole-group instructions	I have arrived	37	80.4
	I am working on this	9	19.6
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I consciously provide extra time for students to process information and complete tasks	I have arrived	25	56.8
	I am working on this	18	40.9
	I do not believe this possible	1	2.3
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I am comfortable breaking down assignments into smaller chunks to lessen frustration and ensure success	I have arrived	26	56.5
	I am working on this	18	39.1
	I do not believe this possible	2	4.3
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I observe students in groups and individually, documenting progress and interaction	I have arrived	20	45.5
	I am working on this	19	43.2
	I do not believe this possible	4	9.1
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.3
I collect a variety of work samples from students which reflects progress and growth	I have arrived	19	42.2
	I am working on this	22	48.9
	I do not believe this possible	3	6.7
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I conference with students to provide one-to-one feedback regarding individual achievement	I have arrived	15	33.3
	I am working on this	20	44.4
	I do not believe this possible	8	17.8
	I am not prepared to deal with this	2	4.4
I adapt assessment procedures as needed to ensure success (oral tests, open book test, shortened test, more time for completion)	I have arrived	24	54.5
	I am working on this	18	40.9
	I do not believe this possible	2	4.5
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
I am comfortable employing individual criteria for student assessment	I have arrived	22	47.8
	I am working on this	21	45.7
	I do not believe this possible	3	6.5
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I present material to a variety of learning modalities within the classroom (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactual)	I have arrived	26	56.5
	I am working on this	16	34.8
	I do not believe this possible	3	6.5
	I am not prepared to deal with this	1	2.2
I am comfortable collaborating with support personnel	I have arrived	35	79.5
	I am working on this	9	20.5
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I am comfortable with support services provided in my classroom	I have arrived	35	79.5
	I am working on this	9	20.5
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I am able to share gifts, talents and needs of my students with colleagues	I have arrived	33	76.7
	I am working on this	9	20.9
	I do not believe this possible	1	2.3
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I see the job description of "teacher" as one who facilitates learning for children of all learning abilities	I have arrived	37	82.2
	I am working on this	7	15.6
	I do not believe this possible	1	2.2
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I embrace the philosophy that each child is important / worthwhile, demonstrating fulfilment of individual responsibilities while supporting one another	I have arrived	40	88.9
	I am working on this	5	11.1
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I believe that all children belong and are capable of learning in the mainstream of school and community	I have arrived	25	56.8
	I am working on this	13	29.5
	I do not believe this possible	6	13.6
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0
I value all children and their contributions to society	I have arrived	41	91.1
	I am working on this	4	8.9
	I do not believe this possible	0	0.0
	I am not prepared to deal with this	0	0.0

Table 21 summarises the responses that the teachers gave to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportions of the teachers who indicated that they had either arrived, were working towards this, did not believe

it to be possible and were not prepared to deal with it when asked about their attitude towards accommodating differently-abled students.

The proportion of disabled learners attending the school is above the national intake. Their impairments include specific learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, moderate to severe learning difficulties, Down syndrome, autism, epilepsy, cerebral palsy and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity disorder. The teachers participating in the study demonstrated by the high responses they gave to the variety of issues corresponding to the philosophy of inclusive education that they believe in inclusive education. Their answers confirm that a large majority of them both appreciate and are open to student diversity. In fact, 85.1% of the teachers stated that they had arrived when it came to respecting disabled students as individuals with differences as they respect all the students in their classroom. Responding to student diversity by encouraging the participation of all students using whole group instruction also rated highly (80.4%). The school practice of provision of a holistic education for all students was confirmed by a very high percentage (88.9%) of the teachers who answered that they “have arrived” when it comes to embracing the philosophy that each child was important and worthwhile, demonstrating fulfillment of individual responsibilities while supporting one another, and (91.1%) stated that they “value all children and their contributions to society.”

Whilst the teacher’s response to the importance of collaboration among staff in the classroom, other school staff, supporting professionals and parents was on the whole positive, there are some challenges. Keeping in mind the support of parents is not only necessary but is deemed essential for both the teaching and supporting of disabled students, but quite often parents are still not viewed as partners in their child’s education. The cultural diversity of the student’s home and their parents are part and parcel of the baggage students bring with them to school. Only 52.2% of teachers stated that they have arrived

at having good communication with parents. This is rather low considering the importance of open communication with parents. Moreover, 41.3 % of the teachers said that they were working on this, implying that they were aware of the importance of good communication channels with parents but do find it challenging.

Differentiating the curriculum by providing for content, process and product differentiation, Tomlinson (2001) albeit challenging to teachers is gradually becoming a reality in the classroom. Although the largest percentage of teachers' responses are located in the 'I am working on this' bracket, it is demonstrated that teachers are ready to frame impairments within the concept of barriers to learning and are prepared to work towards making accommodations and adaptations to overcome different barriers to learning in the context of the classroom. Confirming this, 59.6% of teachers stated that they were working on the subject, consciously making adaptations for students when planning daily activities and being aware of potential problems before they occurred; 34.0% of teachers were of the opinion that they had arrived. Building upon this 53.2% of teachers stating that they were working on planning assignments and activities that allow disabled and non-disabled students to be successful in their learning, and on structure assignments to reduce frustration, 38.3% of teachers stated that they had arrived. Also, 56.5% of the teachers were working towards making adaptations for students and establishing realistic long term teaching objectives, whilst 30.4% of teachers stated that they have arrived, adding to the evidence of the teachers' commitment to providing for differentiation.

Interestingly, providing for individual instruction presents a different picture. Individualisation and creating the necessary support structures is an ongoing struggle for teachers, and at times teachers responded that they are not prepared to do it. For instance, only 22.7% of teachers stated that they had arrived at providing individual instruction for students as needed; whereas



45.5% stipulated that they were working on it. Interestingly, 9.1% of teachers stated that they were not prepared to provide individual instruction, and a staggering 22.7% do not believe it to be possible. To substantiate the above finding it was noted that 22.2% of all teachers believed that it was not possible to provide individual feedback regarding students' own achievements.

Caring relationships in the classroom are an important medium for supporting students' social development and learning. The teachers in this study demonstrated a positive attitude to building a caring and supportive classroom learning community by looking at each student as special and as an individual, together with viewing any student's specific need as only a part of the student. 87.2% of teachers stated that they consciously provided reinforcement and encouragement, placing emphasis on positive gains. The remaining teachers (12.8%) said that they were working on it. Teachers also responded rather positively (57.4%) when stating that they have arrived, and the remaining 42.6 % said they were working on this in determining student interests and strengths and in connecting personally with their students. 73.3% of the teachers stated that they were working on helping students of all abilities learn to find appropriate avenues to express their feelings and needs; 20.0% of teachers had arrived whilst 6.7% of the teachers believed this to be impossible to achieve.

### **Data Analysis of Students' Questionnaires**

The students' questionnaires were analyzed for Primary and Secondary levels separately.

Table 22

Table displaying the percentages of Primary school children by their perception of themselves, their engagement and participation in school

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
I have many good friends	Rarely / Never	5	1.1
	Sometimes	61	14.0
	Usually	370	84.9
I feel I belong in this class	Rarely / Never	8	1.8
	Sometimes	57	13.1
	Usually	369	85.0
I receive help from the teachers and facilitators when I ask	Rarely / Never	10	2.3
	Sometimes	67	15.4
	Usually	359	82.3
My work is displayed	Rarely / Never	15	3.4
	Sometimes	90	20.6
	Usually	332	76.0
I am valued for being me	Rarely / Never	18	4.1
	Sometimes	61	14.0
	Usually	357	81.9
I feel teachers and facilitators like me	Rarely / Never	10	2.3
	Sometimes	66	15.1
	Usually	360	82.6
I am encouraged to achieve	Rarely / Never	9	2.1
	Sometimes	47	10.8
	Usually	380	87.2
I am encouraged to take pride in my own achievements	Rarely / Never	9	2.1
	Sometimes	54	12.4
	Usually	371	85.5
I feel school staff treat me with respect	Rarely / Never	13	3.0
	Sometimes	75	17.3
	Usually	346	79.7
If I have a difficulty I know it will be addressed	Rarely / Never	12	2.8
	Sometimes	93	21.6
	Usually	325	75.6

Table 23

Table displaying the percentages of Secondary school children by their perception of themselves, their engagement and participation in school

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
I have many good friends	Rarely / Never	8	1.9
	Sometimes	29	6.9
	Usually	385	91.2
I feel I belong in this class	Rarely / Never	35	8.3
	Sometimes	60	14.2
	Usually	327	77.5
I receive help from the teachers and facilitators when I ask	Rarely / Never	47	11.2
	Sometimes	92	21.9
	Usually	282	67.0
My work is displayed	Rarely / Never	162	38.4
	Sometimes	133	31.5
	Usually	127	30.1
I am valued for being me	Rarely / Never	35	8.4
	Sometimes	71	17.1
	Usually	310	74.5
I feel teachers and facilitators like me	Rarely / Never	94	22.5
	Sometimes	134	32.1
	Usually	190	45.5
I am encouraged to achieve	Rarely / Never	37	8.9
	Sometimes	87	20.9
	Usually	293	70.3
I am encouraged to take pride in my own achievements	Rarely / Never	49	11.7
	Sometimes	91	21.7
	Usually	279	66.6
I feel school staff treat me with respect	Rarely / Never	75	17.8
	Sometimes	118	28.0
	Usually	229	54.3
If I have a difficulty I know it will be addressed	Rarely / Never	80	19.2
	Sometimes	128	30.8
	Usually	208	50.0

Table 22 and 23 display the frequencies and percentages of students who agree, partially agree or disagree to the ten given statements. Both primary and Senior School students answered positively to all items; however, the younger students tended to agree more with the statements than the senior students.

Looking at friendships, all students answered positively to having good friends, having a sense of belonging and being valued for being themselves. This demonstrates a sense of belonging and cohesion. The students also perceive that they are encouraged to achieve, to take pride in their achievements, which in turn reflects that their teaching teams believe in them. Teachers see each student as an individual and have high expectations for their learning.

The students' responses of their perception of whether they feel that they are treated with respect varies considerable between the primary and senior school students. The primary school students paint a more positive picture, with 79.7% of primary school students answering 'usually' and 17.3% of students saying 'sometimes'. Although it is not a large percentage, it is a matter of concern that 3.0% of the primary school students stated that they felt that they were never treated with respect by the school staff. Whilst only 54.3% of students in the secondary section of the school stated that they felt that they were respected by the school staff, 28.0% stated 'sometimes' and a worrying 17.3% stipulated that they were not respected. This is a concern due to the very fact that respect underpins inclusive education, and one of the goals of inclusion is for students to learn to accept each other's differences and respect each other equally. If students do not feel respected by the adults around them, this will impact on their respect towards others.

The secondary and primary students' responses to receiving help are at the same level, although the primary school students remain more positive. Whilst the senior school students are slightly more negative, both sets of students (82.3% of the primary and 67.0% of the secondary students) stated that they receive help when they ask for it from the teaching team. 21.9 % of secondary students and 15.4% of primary students stipulated that help is given 'sometimes', and 11.2% of senior school students compared with 2.3% of

primary school students felt that they were rarely given help when they asked for it. Feeling safe by knowing that if one had a difficulty it would be addressed again got a more positive response from primary students. 75.6% of younger students stated that usually their difficulties were addressed, compared with 50.0% of senior school students; however, 30.8% of the secondary students compared to 21.6% of the primary school said that sometimes their difficulties were addressed. This confirms that by and large the school can be described as having a caring and supportive learning environment. The students' response to their work being displayed was more positive among the primary school students. 76.0% of primary students stated that their work was displayed, whilst 20.6% said sometimes their work was displayed, as opposed to 30.0% of the secondary students who said their work was displayed, 31.5% saying that sometimes their work was displayed, and a staggering 38.4% of these secondary students replied that their work was rarely or never displayed in contrast to 3.4% of the primary school students.

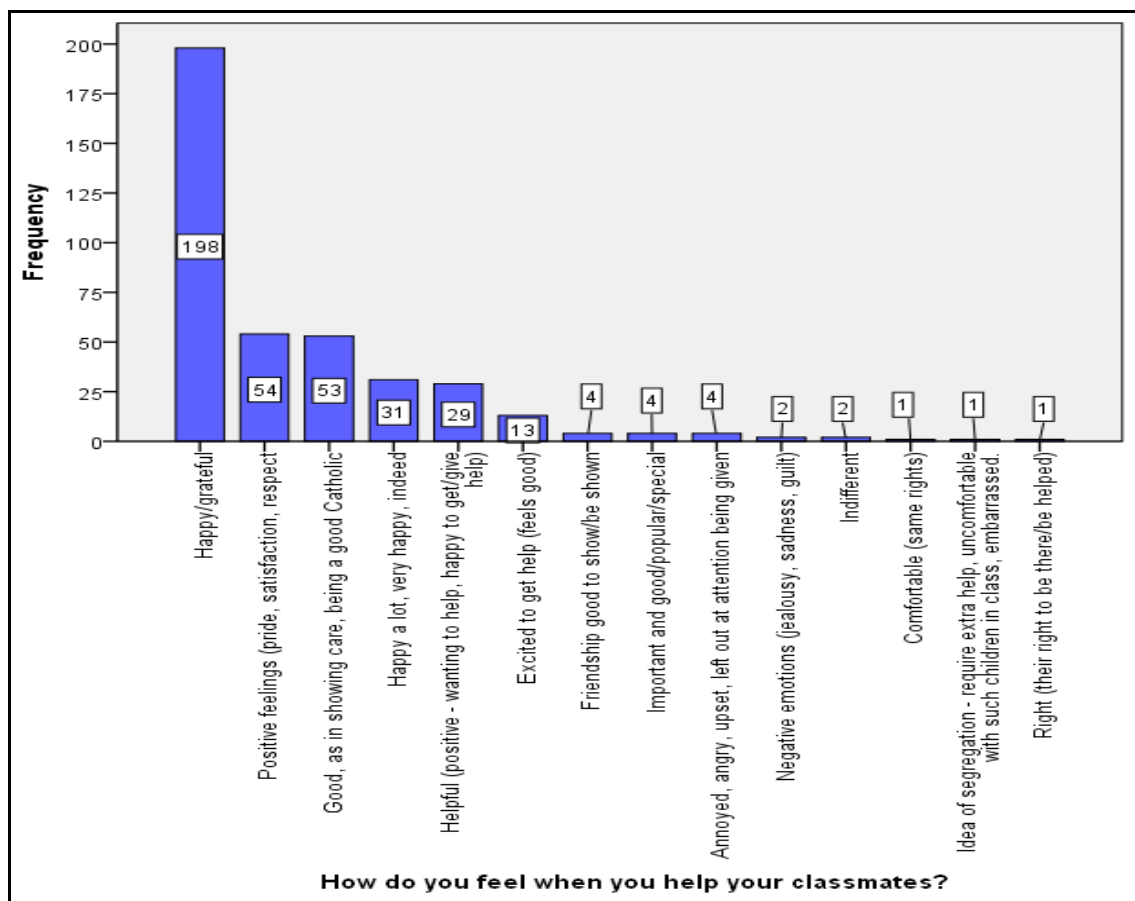


Figure 33  
Peer support

In Figure 33 the majority of primary school students express positive emotions and feedback to helping their peer group. The general feeling towards helping their peers generated positive feelings such as: a good sense of self and a sense of community. The pupils who displayed negative emotions expressed feelings of jealousy, embarrassment, neglect and anger.

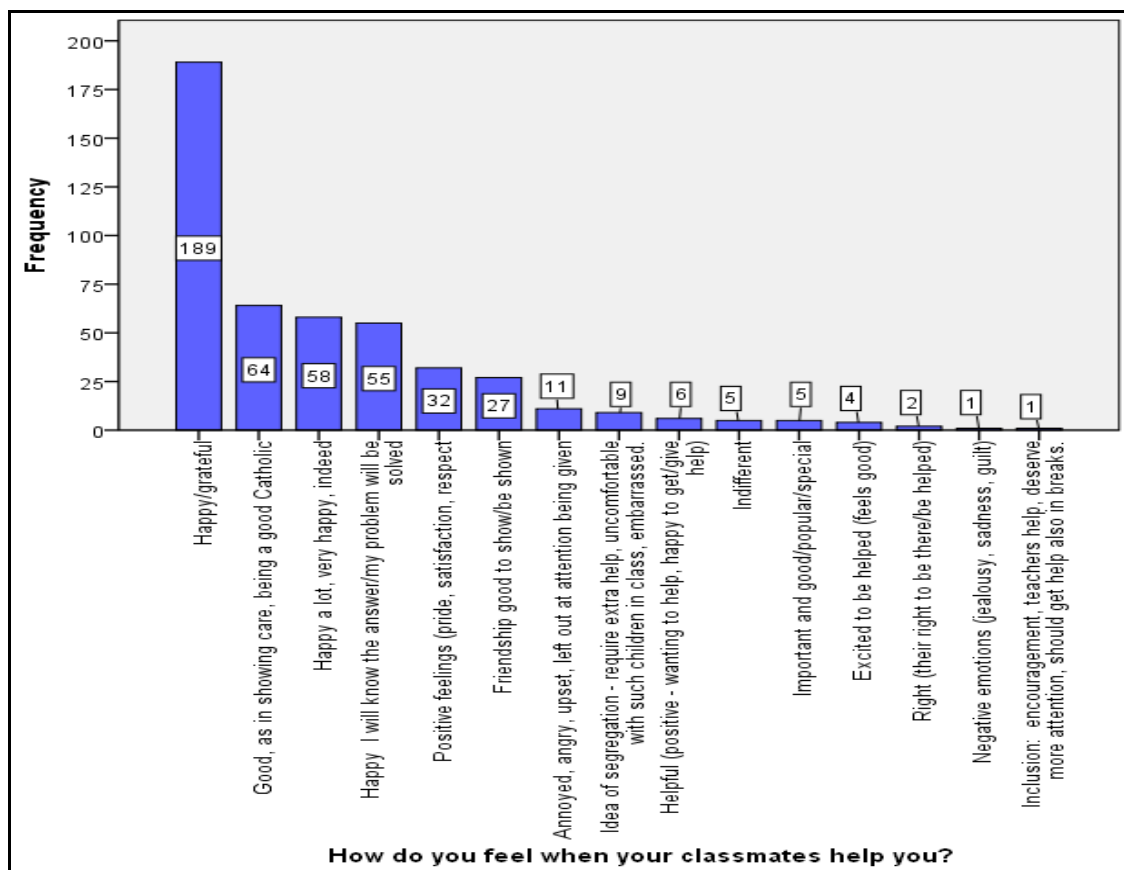


Figure 34  
Receiving peer support

In Figure 34, receiving help from their peers was also a positive experience, merging their own needs with that of their peers. There was evidence that helping one another promotes friendships, and the boys' statements supported an appreciation of individual differences.

Figure 35 indicates that whilst the students' statements on the inclusion of disabled students in class witnessed positive experiences and feelings, it also elicited emotions of jealousy, sadness and guilt in some of the students. Three students mentioned being annoyed and upset by the presence of a disabled student in class.

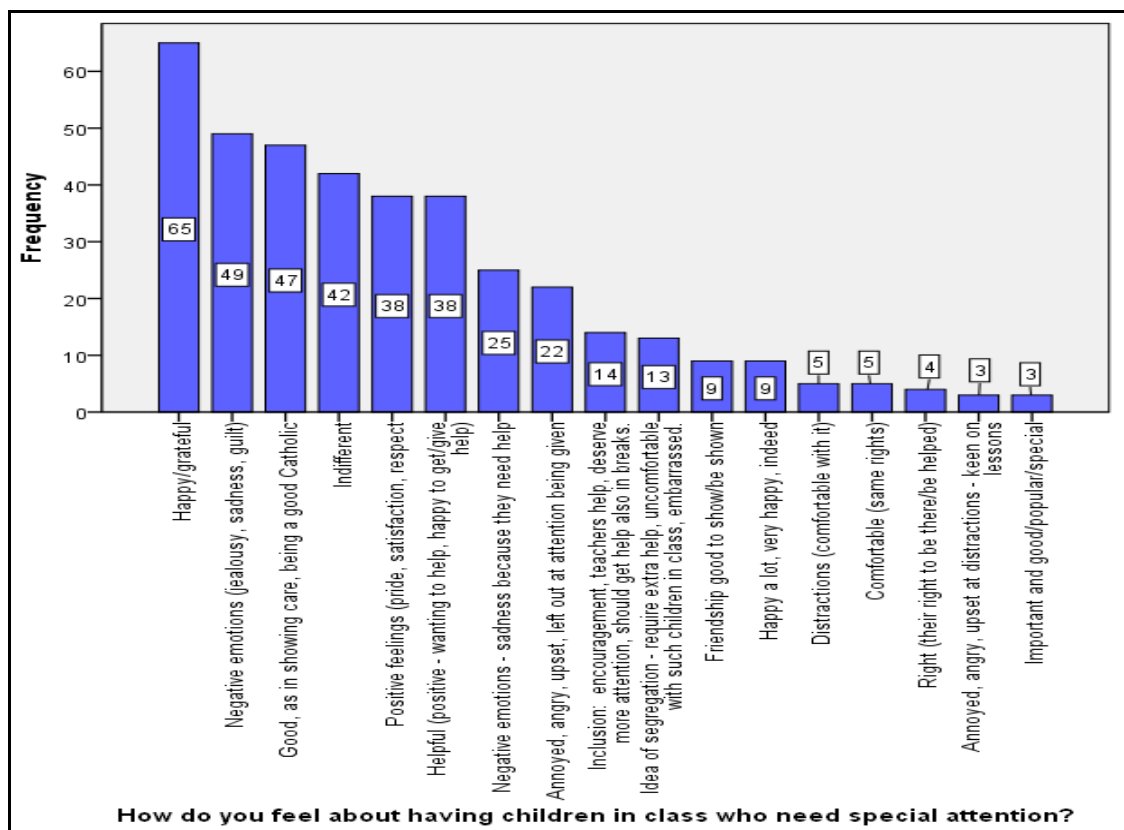


Figure 35

Non-disabled students views on included disabled students

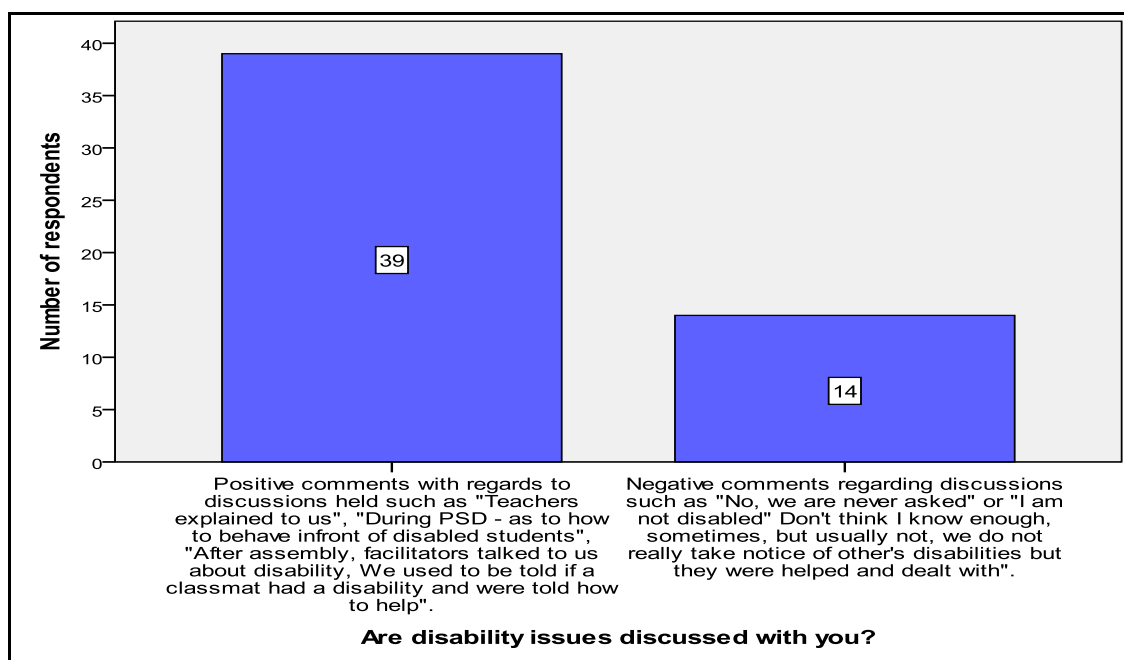


Figure 36

Disability awareness



Figure 36 shows that senior school students commented that teachers' and LSAs tackling of disability issues with them were both positive and negative. Whilst 39 students commented on the ways the staff approached them regarding disability awareness, it seemed to be in a reactionary way on how the students should behave towards the disabled student. 14 students commented in a way that demonstrated that there needs to be disability awareness that will impact the attitudes towards disabled students.

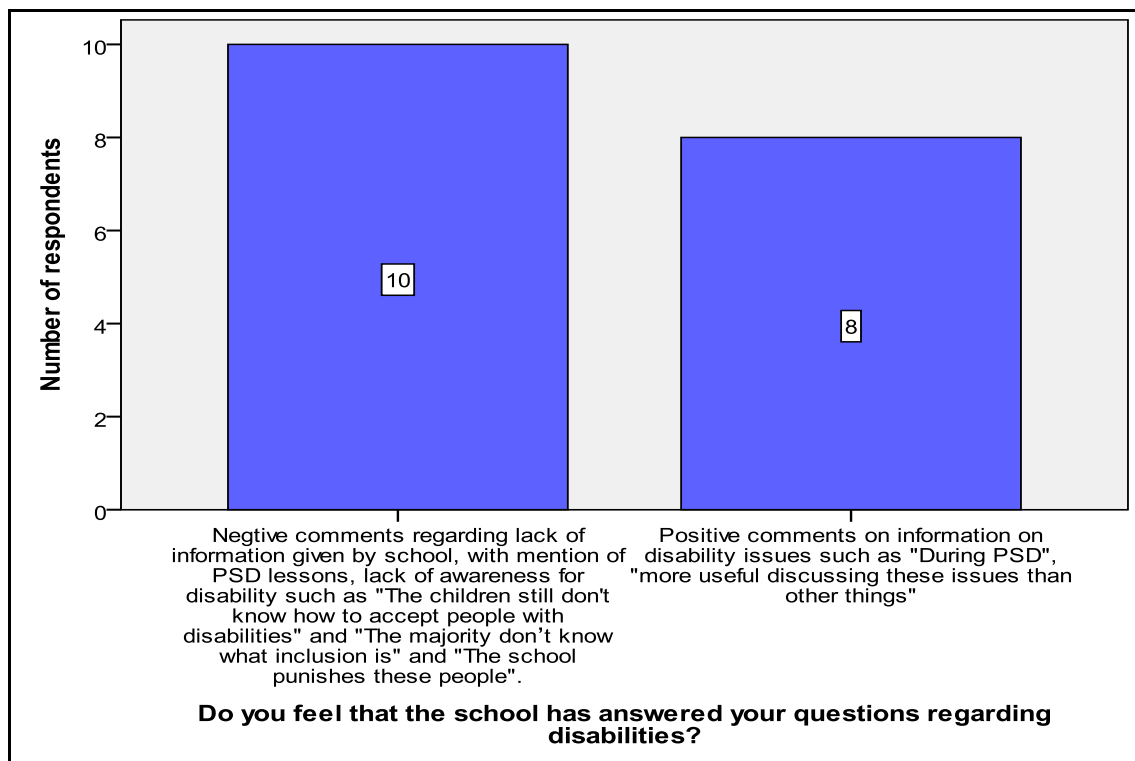


Figure 37  
Disability awareness

In Figure 37, although only a minority of senior school students made negative statements, these may have important implications on the school systems in creating awareness and an acceptance of disabled students.

In Figure 38 students mentioned several settings where they meet up socially with one another, revealing where social acceptance and positive

relationships have been formed between disabled students and non-disabled students.

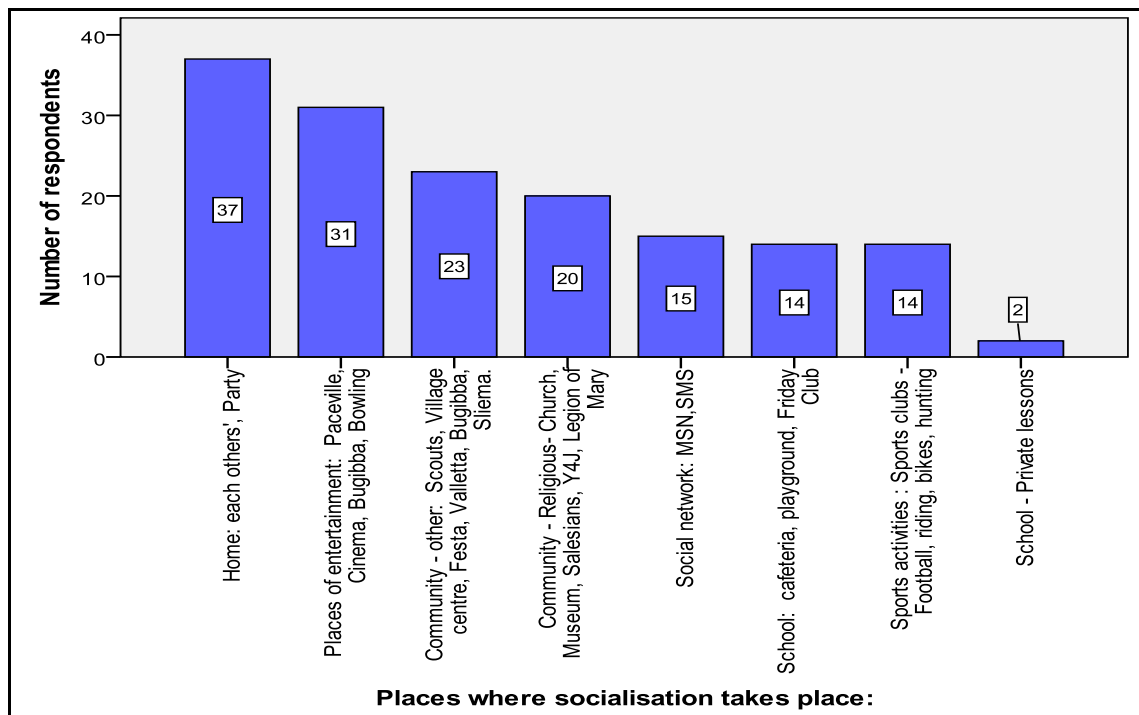
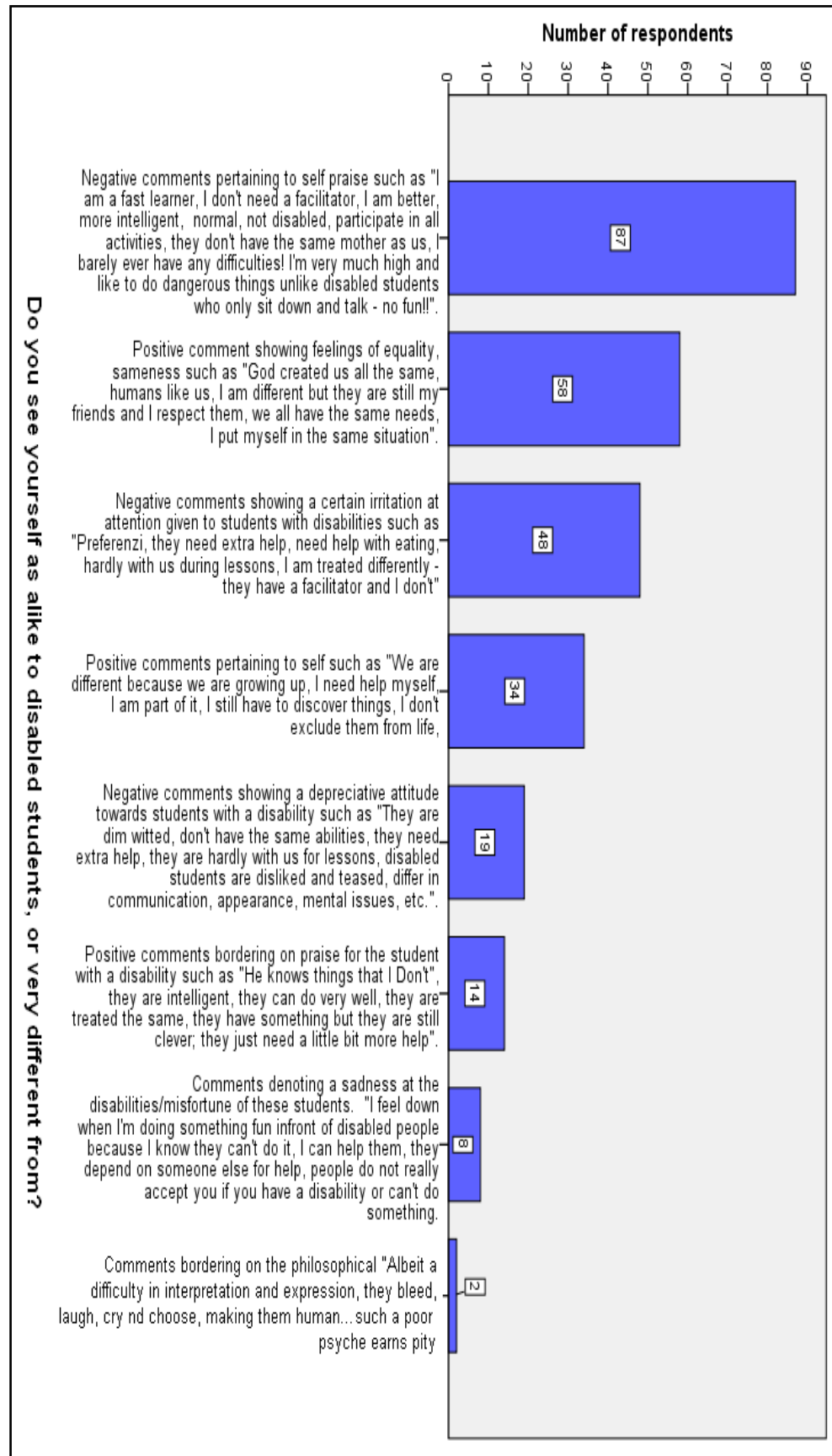


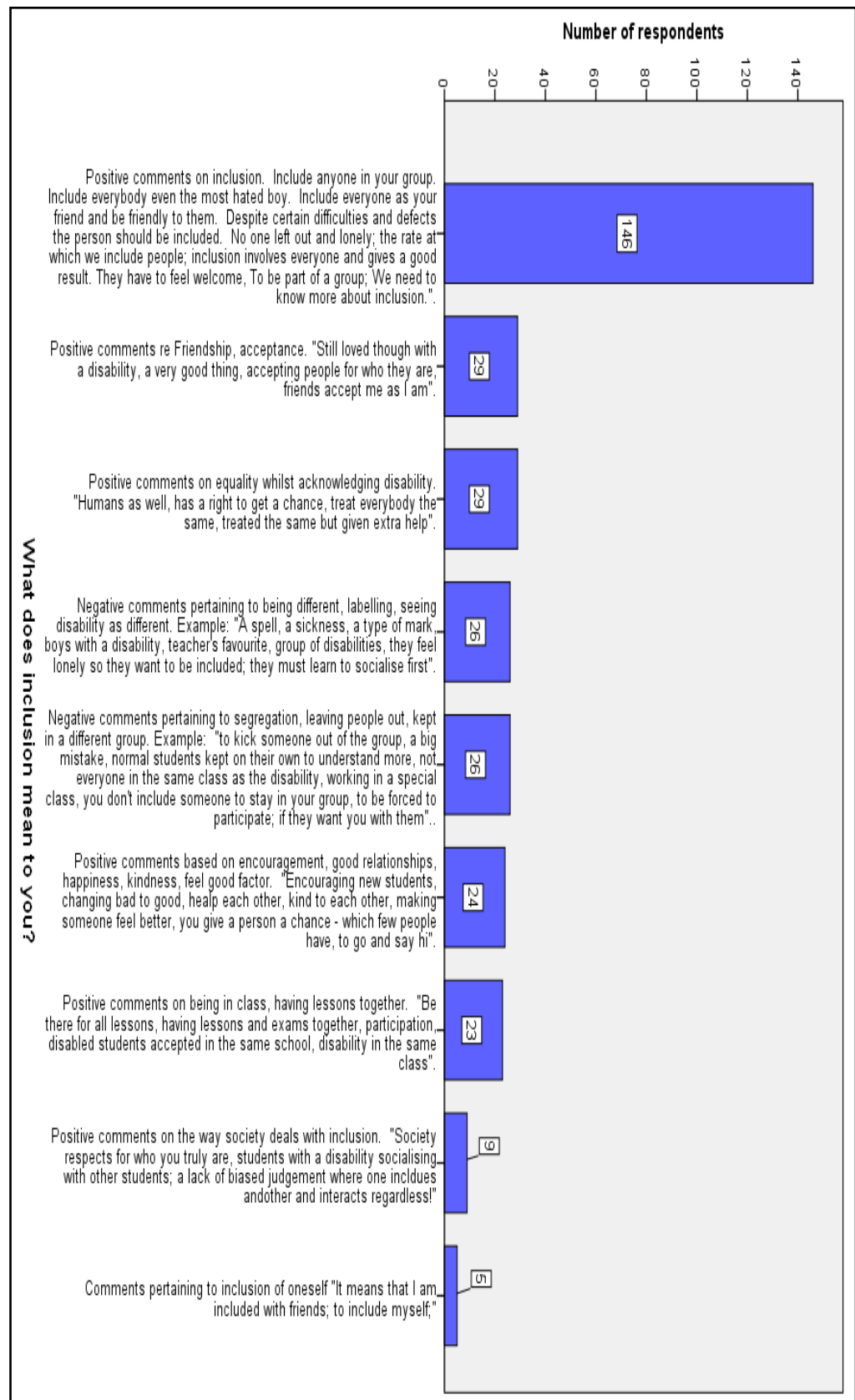
Figure 38  
Socialisation between non-disabled students and disabled students

In Figure 39 the student statements were both positive and negative, but they were also very telling about how they view disabled students as being alike themselves or different from themselves. Positive comments such as 'we are different because we are growing up' and 'I need help myself' in contrast to 'not able', 'teased by others', 'need help'.

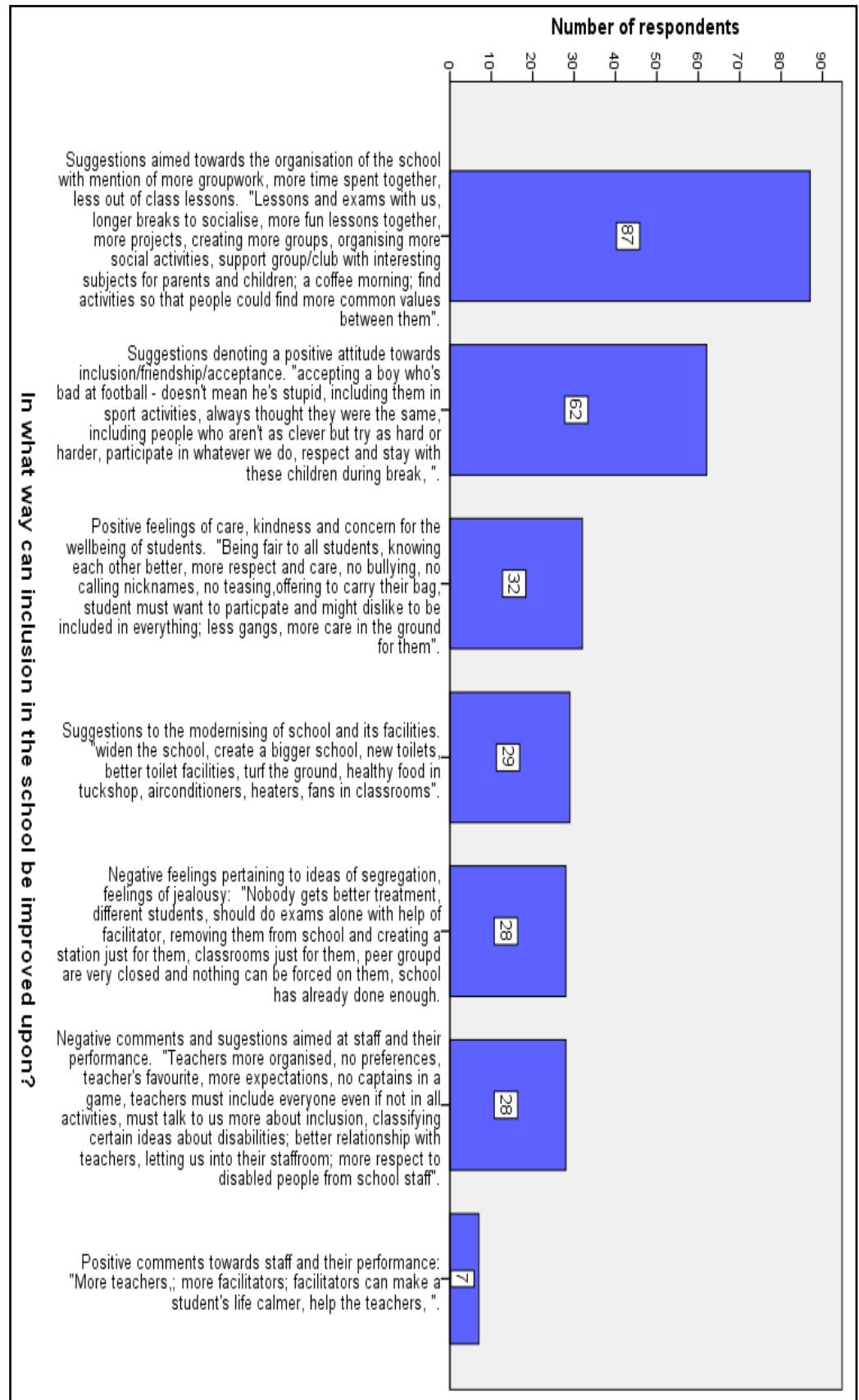
Figure 40 gives an insight of the students' perception of what inclusion is and what it is not through their school experience. The positive statements refer to respect, acceptance, equity, rights, learning together and community. The negative statements are based upon labeling, disabled students being left out, and seeing impairment as a disability.



**Figure 39**  
**Acceptance of diversity**



**Figure 40**  
**Students understanding of inclusion**



**Figure 41**  
**How to improve inclusion**

In Figure 41 students perceived school improvement as the way forward to promoting an improved inclusive school experience for all students. Disabled and non-disabled students identified relevant aspects to the success of inclusive education. Broad themes, such as Universal Design, support groups for students and parents, promoting common values, improving school facilities, equity, and more LSA support for all students in class, are featured.

## **Conclusion**

The main part of this chapter presented the statistical analysis on both close- and open-ended questions answered by parents, teachers and students as part of a case study on a school in Malta practicing inclusive education. Significant influences on the attitudes, perceptions, and teaching methodologies and approaches were outlined for the build-up to effective inclusive practices. However, from the results attained we can generalize that parents of disabled students are more likely to be consulted about the inclusion process than parents of non-disabled students. This is a strong indication that not all parents are viewed as equal partners in educational processes schools.

Interestingly, a large proportion of primary students (79.7%), secondary students (54.3%), parents (99.4%) and teachers (85.1%) believe that all students, including disabled students, are respected and treated equally. It may be possible to attribute the success of this school's inclusive education orientation on issues around school ethos and attitudes. This school came out clearly with a strong positive school ethos in favour of valuing diversity and helping others. Students (Figure 34) reported that receiving help from their peers was a positive experience, merging their own needs with that of their peers. There was evidence that helping one another promotes friendships, and the boys' statements supported an appreciation of individual differences. This positive ethos was also reflected in the teachers' attitudes towards teaching disabled students. An interesting observation is that the proportion of secondary students (17.8%) disagreeing with the above statement is larger than the corresponding percentage of parents (0.6%), teachers (2.1%) and primary students (3.0%).

Parents receiving attention from school staff was rated positively and in the questionnaires results indicated that parents (Table 8) of both disabled and non-disabled students are holding that adopting an open door policy enhances inclusive education. This is a strong indication that the school has been restructured for inclusive education. The notion that family involvement is important to the success of disabled students in mainstream schools is now widely accepted. In fact, the overall picture from the data gathered is that the parents of the disabled students take a great interest in their son's schooling, and attend regular meetings, parents' days, MAPs sessions and IEP meetings as well as daily communication with their sons' teaching team.

The parents of disabled students feel that they are equal members of the school team, although with some reservations. These reservations are about teaching staff assuming a superior role.

These results will be linked with the results of the focus groups and interviews to be presented in the subsequent chapter.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Qualitative Findings – The Experience**

The ethics of social research is about creating a mutually respectful, win-win relationship in which participants are pleased to respond candidly, valid results are obtained and the community considers the conclusions constructive.

McAuley (2003, p. 95)



## Introduction

What indeed is the purpose of an inclusive school, the processes and research that surround it? I have pondered upon this question for many years, and in trying to answer this question one needs to explore many issues in connection with the perceived difficulties of including disabled learners in inclusive classrooms, such as whole school policies, mission statements, cultures, excellence, equity, entitlement, and classroom practices. Educators need to pay attention both to excellence and equity in learning, in order to have a school where all students are truly valued and included. As the person posing the question, I felt that the question could only be answered by working with the school.

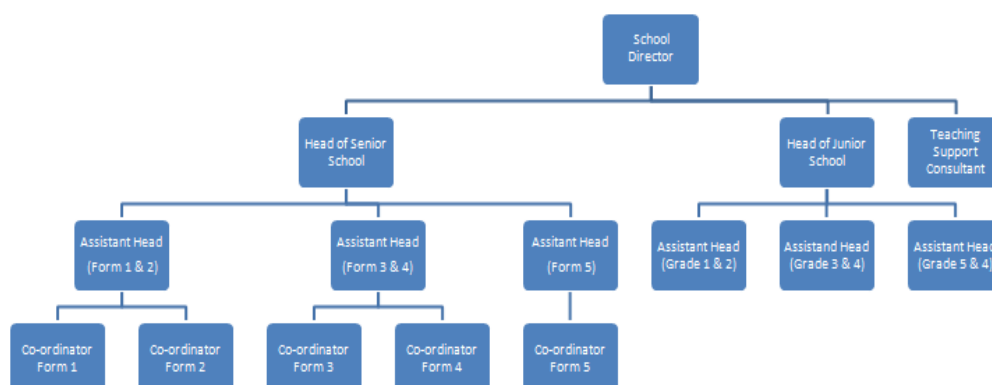


Figure 42

Hierarchy of school administration

This chapter presents the research findings emerging from the interviews held with both the Junior and Senior Heads of school, the four focus groups and with the teaching staff with the aim of eliciting in-depth information about school practices around inclusive education. I discuss these findings in the light of the statistics presented in the previous chapter. This will enable me to discuss the results of this mixed methodology research in view of the literature, thus leading to tentative appropriate conclusions and recommendations pertaining to the attitudes and practices concerning the

inclusion of disabled students in a mainstream school.

Whilst making sense and searching for meaning, I constantly reflected upon the participant's voice and remained true to their actual words. I struggled with finding the right ambiance, the right moment for the analysis, especially due to the fact that I am conscious of both my commitment and passion to this never ending journey towards inclusive education. My involvement in the practice of providing a meaningful education for disabled students to be included within mainstream schools enforced the need for me to stand back and take a reflective role in order to represent the participants' voices without tainting it with my ideals. I was conscious of my need for further insight into the world of administrators, teachers and LSAs within this inclusive school, to increase my thoughtfulness. It was necessary for me to become a challenger, asking questions to generate better solutions for the benefit of all students. This was achieved by going over the recordings, rereading the transcripts and by balancing the need for both categorical data with the need to understand this school's experience of including disabled students. I remained true to the rules of data analysis, which in turn followed on from the rules of data gathering, preceded by the rules for preparing for the research question.

During the interviews and the focus groups, participants participated actively and were engaged with the questions being asked. They were both clear and passionate about their own practice and involvement within the school being researched. All the teaching staff had experience of working in classrooms with and without disabled students, and working on their own as opposed to working in a teaching team. There is also some degree of consensus amongst the staff regarding values of respect for difference and a commitment to offering all students learning opportunities. Having said this, I have to note that this consensus is not unanimous. Contradictions and misconceptions are evidenced within the teaching staff and administration. Interestingly, the teaching teams felt that the disabled students with an educational statement of needs were not the students who caused problems

but: “There are a large number of students who are very weak academically and have behaviour problems.” (Focus Group 2 - Form 3 Coordinator).

Tables 24 and 25 below give an overview of the themes and sub themes that emerged from the two interviews that took place and from the views of the four focus groups. The main findings are discussed under the following themes: positive practices, the professional implementation of inclusive education together with the misconceptions and the difficulties encountered in the implementation and practice of inclusive education. The head teachers, teachers and LSAs all felt, in varying degrees, that working in mixed ability classrooms and catering for diversity, was both difficult and complex. Staff felt the general intent of inclusion is for each member of staff to find his or her own level of inclusion and to work freely, within the same respect and learning opportunity that is offered to every student. Growth of teacher individuality remains the ultimate guarantor of student individuality.

Responding to the specific question of this research: “What changes does the implementation of the Social Model of Disability that focuses on abilities and school population?” The participants perceived the professional implementation of inclusive education, including teacher and LSA professional development, as critical to the successful educational journey for both disabled and non-disabled students alike.

The development and sequence of the themes discussed in this chapter place emphasis on a wide variety of issues and the different processes related to inclusive education.

The themes and sub themes are a detailed analysis of existing arrangements, assumptions, misconceptions, related concerns and the reflective practice of the key members of the school being studied.

## Interviews

Table 24  
Themes derived from Interviews with Heads of School

Themes	Sub themes
1. Positive Practice	1.1 Structure - systematic, extensive, elaborated, flexible 1.2 Creating positive school cultures 1.3 Entitlement 1.4 Trained staff 1.5 Teaching teams 1.6 Inclusive classroom management
2. Atmosphere	2.1 Commitment 2.2 Friendly environment 2.3 An open door policy 2.4 Positive attitudes 2.5 Caring relationships
3. Teamwork	3.1 Collaboration
4. Diversity	4.1 Inclusive education 4.2 Reflective practice 4.3 Planning
5. Support Structures	5.1 Establishing the help the student needs and how and if it can be delivered 5.2 Individual Planning
6. Parental Involvement	6.1 Partnerships with Parents 6.2 Parents discuss their concerns and expectations
7. Assessments and Evaluation	7.1 Assessing progress of students

### Positive Practice (1.)

Both the Heads of the Senior and Junior School raised several issues around positive practice, namely, school structure, creating a positive school culture, working towards a common goal, advantages and the disadvantages of teacher/class/subject LSA, teamwork, the involvement of parents and the importance of having trained staff and ongoing staff development.

**Structure - systematic, extensive, elaborated and flexible.**

Both Heads of School felt that a whole school support structure needs to be in place and these structures need to recognise and respond to the diverse needs of all the students, accommodating both the different styles and rates of learning, whilst ensuring quality education for all students “nurturing the learning of all students” (Head of Junior School). The same participant mentioned her reservations, based upon the perception that inclusive practices in schools cannot be based solely upon the rights to education but need to be directed to the school as becoming a community of learners where the quality of learning is central and therefore everyone’s learning is seen as being important and provided for.

“Alright, it is true that education is for all, but you have to make certain that all the children get all they need or the maximum they need for their needs, and a school should not in my opinion take on the responsibility of children for whom she cannot provide what they need.”

The Head of the Senior School spoke about structures needing to include and incorporate diverse programmes and approaches “to offer a better choice, a better product to the student.” Both participants experienced including all the students as a challenge.

“To include everyone, both the gifted and the disabled student who is difficult to see where he is gifted, is extremely challenging. The challenge is putting the philosophy into practice” (Head of Senior School).

In order to address the challenges of inclusion for all, the Head of a Senior School felt the importance of a whole school policy as he explains:

“I tend to prefer a whole school policy which caters for various needs. I am very much afraid of having something which is very tailored for a narrow

group of students, because then I'm afraid we would end up compartmentalizing, and immediately this will not be inclusion."

Expanding upon this theme he also argued that:

"Every student should achieve his 100%, so it needs to include everyone. One, the system, and we as individuals are part of the system, needs to create a system of 'catchment.' If one programme, one person, one structure is not reaching a student, or is not reaching a student enough, then there should be a second layer, which would do a better job. If that is not enough, ideally set up another layer. However, in an ideal situation everybody should be reached in one way or another, ideally on time."

However, the Head of the Junior School had her reservations and noted how there is a need for the structures not only to be in place in the secondary section of the school but also for continuity of these support structures:

"I can see disabled students progressing through the Junior School, but they provide a very big challenge once they go to the Senior School unless the structures of the whole school, the whole setup of the school, provides for these children."

### **Creating a positive school culture.**

The challenge of creating a positive school culture begins with the very language we use, together with the definitions we give to that language within today's social context. An inclusive school culture requires educators to commit themselves to using a shared language. Language users make choices when they are making meanings. The choices made highlight and give meaning to what is really said. Both Heads felt that the difficulty is not

word disability but the implementation of the word and the language that surrounds disability.

“When we are saying the disabled, then it derives from the poor, which is literally everyone, so I think the difficulty is not the word, the ‘disabled’, it is the implementation of the word disabled (Head of Senior School).”

The translation of school ethos into practice is considered as an important element for both participants. “It’s the translation of the mission into every-day language, which is a difficulty, which is the ongoing challenge” (Head of Senior School).

It is about creating a caring environment that ensures that all “students learn at their own pace” (Head of school). An open door policy, transition programmes, peer group support, buddy systems, and seeing students and their families as individuals are all structures in place that go towards creating a caring and safe environment for all learners. “A wink here or there or just a question: is everything all right. Obviously, my office is always open” (Head of Senior School).

### **Entitlement.**

The interviewees not only demonstrated an understanding of the concepts which relate to entitlement versus support and to the disabled student, but more than that they also recognized the challenges of putting this understanding into practice. The interviewees felt that the whole school, namely both the Junior and Senior sections, have to have a structure that provides for the participation, learning and inclusion of disabled students.

“Unless the structure of the whole set-up of the school provides for disabled students, they can’t be included. I realize they

have a right to be included, but a right to something that is beneficial to disabled students” (Head of Junior School).

The Head of Senior School explained his ideas about equity and responding to diversity:

“The system has to provide for differences, so it cannot provide the same for all. Now equity; there is equity but, I have to keep underlining it throughout, there is always the idea of a certain level of compromise.”

He expanded upon this by stressing that, whilst he felt it was realistic to make compromises, they should not become a barrier to providing the necessary support for any student.

### **Trained staff.**

Both Heads of School being interviewed felt that staff needed to be trained. Moreover, having trained teachers and LSAs is crucial not only to including disabled students within the classroom, but also to teach a mixed ability school population. As the Head of Junior School explained: “First of all you have to make certain that you’ve got the staff and personnel who know exactly what to do and not expect the admin to tell them what to do.”

She went on to support this later on in the interview when speaking about students carrying the label Attention Deficit Disorder:

“We need to have the expertise; we need to understand the students ...If we have the proper people in place and we know how to deal with students with ADHD and we foresee a lot of their difficulties. They are people who can give their utmost to society; it’s just harnessing that potential and calming the students down, helping them to behave” (Head of Junior School).



Further on in the interview she spoke about her staff being trained. “All our LSAs have been trained, and the teachers have been trained towards that ideal, and even if a child is very challenging in his behaviour we work hard at making him merge in.”

Whilst the monitoring and appraisal of teachers’ and LSAs’ performance was important, giving both teachers and LSAs opportunities for professional development was also considered as a necessary ingredient of inclusive school practice. Although it is not a formal procedure, the Head of the Junior School explained: “Well, a lot of evaluation is done in the office, but very little is done on a formal basis.”

In the Senior School, although the Head claims that his staff performance is monitored informally, there is a structure and records are kept. Interestingly, feedback from students and parents is encouraged and acted upon. Also, results are linked to teacher performance, as the Head of the Senior School explained:

“Teachers’ performance is monitored mainly indirectly through the results of the kids, through feedback from the staff, students and parents. As well as through monitoring, especially by senior management, on what is happening on a daily and lesson by lesson basis. I also try to have at least one interview with every teacher and LSA throughout the year.”

During the individual meetings with his teaching staff the Head aims to get the teachers’ perspective of their own performance:

“I would try and get feedback on the teacher’s perspective of what he or she is doing or the LSA’s perspective of what he or she is doing... I would be sharing with them the way I see their work or the way they are helping others, whatever the situation is, and obviously that would be both positive and things that can be improved.”

A record of the meetings is kept.

“I keep a record of what happened and in some situations, where I need to draw attention of a very specific thing that needs to be improved, obviously I would keep track of when I drew attention that something needs to be improved.”

### **Teaching teams.**

The creation of teaching teams at the school being studied came about through training and experience. Both the interviewees were knowledgeable about the establishment of teaching teams and the implementation of teamwork:

“...[I]f we could start building a team in a classroom, if we could start teaching teachers in a class and the LSAs, the school would really provide for everybody. That’s joining the two ends together, and that’s what has kept us going” (Head of Junior School).

Teachers know how to teach. They know how to teach all learners. This does not mean that they know everything about how to teach all learners. It does however mean that learners are more similar to other learners than they are different. It implies that most of the ordinary techniques of teaching will work. “If we could just put their abilities and what people have learnt about how to reach these children inside the classroom, it would be ideal” (Head of Junior school).

The Head of the Junior School explains how classroom and subject teachers can and do accept the responsibility for the teaching of disabled and non-disabled students working collaboratively with a LSA in class. “The teaching team are able to work together and together, with their abilities, they can see to the list of children.”

### **Inclusive classroom management .**

Both Heads of the respective sections of the school feel administration has worked hard together at putting strategies in place that increase student attention, participation and on task behaviour. One of the main strategies in the Junior School is class analysis. As the Head of the Junior School explained:

“During the first couple of weeks the teachers and their teams focus on getting to know as much about the children as they can, about their abilities, and by the third or fourth week we start having class analysis, which means every team meets the assistant head or coordinator and they ask any questions they need to have answered about their particular class.”

Information given to the teaching team is background information, but the Head of Junior School stressed that:

“...Enough information not too much information, especially not too much information about the kind of child he was in the previous year, ... so that we see to them, not to label them and only through analyzing the class can we hope first of all to make certain that every child through every subject has the right level, the right level when the task is differentiated. When the teacher is giving the lesson, she knows her target, what she is going to aim at, at which level she has to start and then to climb up to.”

### **The Atmosphere (2)**

The overall feelings of the participants are that the school is both a welcoming and a caring environment. The school climate includes social interactions between staff, students and parents establishing rapport and

trust. Greetings are used both informally and formally. The students are addressed using their first names. Teaching staff also address one another using first names between themselves, but in front of the students they use full name terms. This is interchangeable with parents, but parents are often on first name terms with the school staff.

### **Commitment.**

Both participants demonstrated a strong commitment towards inclusion. The Head of Senior School feels he embraces inclusion due to his own value system: “because I believe and practice the school’s Mission which is to include everyone.” The Head of the Junior School reports how hard she, together with the school, worked towards commitment: “I think that as long as I’ve been here we’ve put in a lot of work nurturing the learning of all students.”

### **Friendly environment.**

The participants in the interviews felt that the school was both welcoming and friendly. The Head of Junior School expanded upon this theme:

“Well, it is second nature here, so I don’t know how, they just feel welcome. I mean, I’ve just seen three new students last week and one of the parents was not sure whether to send him to our school or not, but in the evening she called me and said “I feel stupid not to send him, you are all so caring”. I am just mentioning a recent thing that came up” (Head of Junior School).

In the senior section of the school new students and their families are welcomed on two levels, individually and as a group with key people. The

Head of Senior School explained:

“When they come in, they have a meeting with the assistant heads and with myself; as it is only one child; I will tend to identify the face, so there’s a certain amount of contact between me and that child over a period of weeks or months. “Even if it is only eye contact or a wink here and there or just a question, is everything ok” (Head of Senior School).

This was the second time the Head of Senior School used this expression which further demonstrated the Heads commitment to fostering a welcoming school community.

The Buddy system being used to support new individual students is explained by the Head of Senior School: “We set up peer groups so that they are immediately introduced. In practice, we discuss and identify a couple of students, two, three students who can be their buddies for the first month or so to help them to integrate.”

The majority of students coming into Form 1 are a natural progression from the Junior School and are welcomed into Senior School as a group, as explained by the Head:

“The students coming in straight into Form 1, I try to do it with them as well, but it is a large group... it’s not... I am not so effective at that level, then the year tutors have a higher profile and the assistant heads, as well, so to a certain extent I would tend to say it is a fairly well implemented practise” (Head of Senior School).

### **An open door policy.**

The Heads of both the Junior and Senior School have adopted an open door policy for students and their parents. The Head of Senior School

confirms this by stating: “obviously, the office is always open for them to come and speak to me, both him and the parents, and they usually do.”

The Head of the Junior School creates a space, first thing every school morning, to meet parents:

“The first part of the day I see the parents physically, personally, not on the phone. I think that it is very important listening, listening to parents’ expectations, listening to their complaints and understanding their backgrounds. So we always have had an open door policy” (Head of Junior School).

### **Positive attitudes.**

Both the Heads of School demonstrated a positive orientation towards inclusive education at their school. All students are seen as individuals, and the concern is about giving each student his or her entitlement, “actually targeting their needs” (Interview with Head of Senior School). This same positive attitude was reiterated by Head of the Junior School: “All children without any exception are entitled to education; as such we always keep that as a priority, sort of to make certain all the children of all levels learn at their own pace.”

### **Caring relationships.**

Caring and supporting relationships are key components of an inclusive school: “...if there are relationship,s then at the end of the day we would be addressing the needs of the individual more.” (Head of Senior School) Both Heads of School deliberately seek to build caring relationships with and among their pupils and staff. The Head of Senior School explains his practice:

“I think we try and manage to a certain extent that each child feels that when he comes to school there’s a relationship waiting for him. The relationship can be with, and preferably should always involve somewhere down the line, a member of staff and other students” (Head of Senior School)

He also reflected upon the idea of the school community being a family:

“He [the student] is coming here to spend his time within that context of that relationship or a web of relationships, and that’s when I say this is a family or should be a family. So it is a family not just a place where I have to go for a certain amount of hours” (Head of Senior School).

### **TEAMWORK (3)**

As mentioned above in the Teaching Teams section, the creation of teaching teams is considered to be a successful component of this school’s provision for the preparation and planning towards both the school’s support and its teaching needs. As the Head of the Junior School explained:

“I like the idea of the team; I think it is fantastic, the teaching team, we’ve put a lot of work into it. We have to make certain that those three people work, they see eye to eye and their personalities match, their qualifications, their abilities and that they are able to work as a team” (Head of Junior School).

The Head of Senior School feels that he has experienced an increase in teamwork at teaching staff level, and mentions teamwork with the senior management team. When he talks about the staff working as a school team he defines it as progress: “this is cooperation working together for at least a couple of hours, there is progress.”

## **Collaboration.**

We need to consider the bigger picture in order to gain professional balance. Collaboration is a prerequisite to a school that claims to be practicing inclusive education. The school community includes a range of members, from students to their parents, teachers, LSA and administration. Both Heads of School use information gathered from reports, staff, parents and community members to develop reasoned approaches for both change and action. Certain processes and attitudes enable collaborative practice, and the participants, whilst they were aware of these practices, felt it was quite difficult to always equate it with their daily planning within their busy leadership supporting roles. The Head of the Junior School spoke about collaboration not just amongst the teaching teams but across the grades:

“Every grade has three teaching teams and they are expected to work together; so even in designing the schemes of work, they do have to collaborate, and when they are planning together and they share what they have done together, it becomes natural for them to share” (Head of Junior School)

She placed the responsibility on the administration to ensure collaboration between the teams: “The coordinator or assistant head or the Head has to make certain that there is a certain amount of collaborating and sharing.”

At the other end of the scale the Head of Senior School speaks with conviction about taking decisions centrally, as opposed to decisions taken through a consensus:

“At the end of the day the decisions in a school are taken centrally. They are not taken by consensus. I am totally against and abhorrent to a situation where a decision is taken by running a vote between all the staff. That will not happen on my watch” (Head of Senior School)



He goes on to say that this practice of decisions being taken centrally is carried out not only with the staff but with everyone involved in the school: “Yes, everyone, parents, staff, whoever.” He also explains that all the decisions he takes are both informed and in the best interest of the school, and it is according to his individual way: “It’s a personal approach, I would listen to suggestions, I would look, allow a period of time to look around, research, discuss and refine a point of view.” The biggest stumbling block in full collaboration is the difference in focus resulting in mixed messages. We all need to share more openly.

#### **Diversity (4)**

The school being studied regards itself as being proactive in recognising the differences between its students. Teachers in Malta today have a much wider range of students whom they have to teach, and this is true of the school being studied. The Head of the Junior School recounts her teaching days and explains that children were always a heterogeneous group of learners: “I always noticed that there is mixed ability, we always had a mixed ability of students.” Regarding curriculum she communicated that it was always a difficulty: “Loads of curriculum, and you have to make certain you reach every individual in a very wide spectrum.” Whilst both Heads of school recognise that there is still more work to be done in the area of inclusion, they do feel a sense of achievement vis-à-vis the school’s awareness of differences in learning and in their response to meeting disabled students’ needs in the classroom.

#### **Inclusive education.**

Both interviewees see inclusive education as a part of their responsibility, challenging a long and a never-ending journey and not solely

pertaining to disabled students. "Inclusion is very difficult, a very vast subject, and I am talking about statemented children and not talking about inclusion in its wide sense" (Head of Junior School).

The Head of the Senior School explains that inclusion and community building is a goal: "Theoretically yes, in practice it is a goal, a utopia that we tried and worked well. The more we work towards it the more we realize that we have a lot of work to do."

The Head of Junior School sees inclusion as an ongoing journey: "Well, I can see a big stretch ahead, we haven't arrived, we never arrive, we never get perfection, but I think we have walked, we have gone a very long way in the journey especially in the Junior School." The Head of the Senior School confirms this: "The more you look into it and the more you improve, the more you realize that you have miles and miles to go."

### **Reflective practice.**

To be able to lead their staff in being able to respond effectively to disabled students, Heads of Schools need to reflect on their own beliefs and practices regarding the inclusion of disabled students, and indeed to challenge these beliefs and practices, because this will facilitate sound inclusive practice. Both Heads of School demonstrated evidence of reflective practice at different points throughout their interviews. The Head of Senior School reflects on his own practice: "I will try to do better, and tomorrow I will try and do even better than that, even though tomorrow I will realise that I have failed miserably, so I will try again."

The Head of the Junior School reflected upon whether or not disabled students with significant impairments are getting enough from being included in the school: "...can we provide for this particular child, his needs are so great, can we actually say that we are giving him the best?" She goes on to confirm her belief that all students can benefit by being included in

mainstream education: “I’m sure that being in a mainstream school he always benefits from just that you know, psychologically, that is always a plus but does he need, does he have enough?”

Making mistakes is human, and both Heads of School were ready to be human and admit to making a mistake to parents and to reflect upon it: “If we do something, that is a mistake, I have to say “sorry we made a mistake”, and I have to improve on it” (Head of Senior School).

### **Planning.**

Inclusive educational practice demands planning to bring about the change needed to respond appropriately to disabled students’ learning by reducing barriers to learning. The Head of the Junior School felt that the whole set-up of the school has to provide for disabled students. In order for this to happen, planning is essential. Inclusion is planned for as explained by the Head of Junior School: “I started learning about all the procedures, MAPs and IEPs and task analysis, and inputting what I had learnt in class.” She mentions ‘a vision for the Junior School’ which again implies planning. There is also the planning of the teaching teams: “Teams are chosen, there is a lot to be done about personalities, making sure that it is not just putting three people together in a four-sided room” (Head of Junior School)

This planning is meant to ensure that the teams are able to work as a team in order to reach all the students in their class and in order to create balanced classes: “There’s a lot of matching, a lot of psychology to be studied, a list of pupils to make certain that it is a balanced, mixed ability class” (Head of Junior School).

Through planning, every student has access to the learning of the class: “...we can hope first of all to make certain that every child through every subject has the right level” (Head of the Junior School). There is planning from curriculum, literacy, organising educational outings, to writing

policies as explained by the Head of Junior School: “Whether it is curricular, whether it is literacy, whether it is mathematics, organising educational excursions and making sure they fit into the curriculum, checking their learning so we don’t ever lose sight of the boy.”

In the senior section of the school, individual planning was stressed as a necessary means of targeting the learning needs of the disabled student: “the diversity of the different programmes and approaches” (Interview with Head of Senior School).

The need to plan for a layer of systems was also stressed:

“[We] need to create a system of ‘catchment’, kind of, if one programme, one person, one structure, whatever is not reaching the child, there should be a second layer, which would do a better job, and if that is not enough, ideally set up another layer” (Head of Senior School).

Planning is also evident between the year groups who are encouraged to plan schemes of work together: “in the designing of the schemes of work and when they are planning” (Head of Junior School). Planning for student transition from the Junior School into Senior School, and also for those students who come in from another school, is established as explained by the Head of Senior School:

“They come in and have a meeting with the Assistant Heads and with myself. What’s coming in from Year 6 would be given attention by the class tutors and by the year tutors. There would be extra emphasis by the PSD teachers who would be taking them round the school” (Head of Senior School).

## **Support Structures (5)**

The support of trained learning support assistants in the schools should makes it possible to provide a positive inclusive school experience for disabled students and their non-disabled peers: “We did start having LSAs to help children with particular needs ...we didn’t even know where to start from; they were babysitters” (Head of Junior School).

This support was within this school, and indeed still is, in the majority of schools in Malta often seen as exactly what a disabled student requires in order to be included. Thus leaving the school to sit back with a clear conscience and act as host to the disabled student. The LSA, in turn, will handle most of the planning, adapting, supervision and instruction, and in fact be responsible both for the writing of and implementation of the student’s IEP. Relying on the LSA may feel effective, both by administration and teachers, because it takes the pressure off the teachers and leaves them free to carry on with their teaching, regardless of the disabled student’s presence in their class. The Head of the Junior School explains her thoughts and reactions at the time LSA’s were being introduced:

“Helping the LSA’s in class, and this should be good if we start building a team in a classroom, if we could start teaching the teachers in class and the LSAs and you could provide really for everybody, that’s joining the two ends together” (Head of Junior School).

Both the Heads of the respective sections of the school talk about whole school structures to support the learning of all students: “In a nutshell, everyone should achieve his 100%, so it needs to include everyone, a whole school policy, which caters for various needs” (Head of Senior School).

### **Establishing the help the student needs, and the how and if it can be delivered.**

Students are identified as needing support, but are not labelled, as voiced by the Head of the Junior School: "...so that we see to them, not to label them." Both Heads of School felt strongly about singling the disabled students out by having a SEN policy within the school. The Head of the Senior School explained his rationale for having and implementing a whole school support policy:

"Now I am very much afraid of something which is very tailored for the want of a better word, a narrow group because then I am afraid that we would end up compartmentalized; it will not be immediate, but it's not inclusion, you're faced with somebody so the first thing you do ... is he compartment A or compartment B?" (Head of Senior School).

### **Individual planning.**

Individual planning needs to reflect both the student's ambitions and his needs in order to accommodate the student and ensure he accesses the learning presented. The deficit model of one size fits all was mentioned by the Head of Senior School: "by trying to provide different catchment programmes, not just one programme fits for all" The Head of Junior School spoke about the need to have high expectations: "I believe there are children whose skills are not being stretched enough." Individual Educational programmes are seen both as a way of ensuring that the disabled student receives his entitlements, and also as an exclusionary practise:

"...what is causing the child to be at that level? Is it because he can't read so well so, the paper has to be adapted. Isn't there a chance of him ever getting to read unless he gets a one-to-one

lesson of how to read. So that can be done through group work and through an IEP” (Head of Junior School).

The Head of Senior School shares his reservations: “Then in some aspects obviously there’s the IEP, which are for the individual students.” IEPs are also viewed as a compromise between what the student needs and what the school can offer: “IEP, no matter what we say at the end of the day, is a compromise of what the child needs and what the parents and school can offer.”

Perhaps this is a misconception because an IEP should be worked within the constraints of the school. In fact he confirms this viewpoint by stating: “...within what we have got, so it’s a compromise. We can’t really offer, for example, horse riding, if we haven’t got a horse out there, can we?” (Head of Senior School).

## **Parental Involvement (6)**

The building up of good relationships between the student’s parents and the school is not only a positive way of recognising the wider diversity of students backgrounds, strengths, interests, expectations and needs, but having the support of parents is particularly necessary within the field of inclusive education. Whilst working towards fostering and sustaining parental interest in education: “As a school I think it’s one of our strongest points as long as the people who are leading believe in it and want it, it will get there, it will still be there as a forte” (Head of Junior School)

There are some reservations in the secondary section of the school about the study over parent involvement. However, the Head does consider parental contact and responsibility as important: “Yes, but not enough as usual I suppose” (Head of Senior School).

Whilst the Head of Senior School recognised that parents form the basis of education for their sons, he also had his reservations pertaining to parental involvement within the school, especially within the curriculum and with parents exercising their rights and showing their concerns. Parents are not seen as professionals, but as 'the parent'.

"The parents have full responsibility of the education experience and process that the child is passing through, but we say that we are professionals and we say even more than that, we have a very special mission to do stuff related to the kids in education. If that is true, we cannot relinquish to a non-professional" (Head of Secondary School).

He goes on to explain that there is a balancing act between parents and professionals: "It's a balancing act between who bears the final responsibility and who should be doing things for the good of the child."

The Head of Senior School Speaks of his experience with parents who disagreed with a decision taken by administration and gave the following as an example:

"Again there was a situation when parents disagreed with something that the school is doing, basically the options exercise, instead of coming to discuss it with me and we go over, why the options exercise in a certain way. We got a lot of fooling around of petitions. Petitions sent to the director. Again I accepted to meet parents, however I would not answer to this fooling around of petitions. Then they refused to come and then I got another petition, wonder of wonders made up totally, all the people signing it were lecturers or assistant lecturers at university. Then I obviously said by all means come along the whole lot of you I will explain what I have to explain, but I will talk to you as parents" (Head of Senior School).



He feels that the difficulties arise from both parents and teachers: "...on both sides of the divide; for example, some members of staff to a varying degree consider parents as a threat, and parents consider the school and the staff as a legitimate target for target practice."

Effective communication with parents requires the school staff to apply a consistent range of relevant strategies, which the Head of the Senior School refers to as the proper communication channels: "If there is a difficulty on both sides, initially I feel everybody tends to be more comfortable with gossiping or arguing or whatever, rather than taking it up with the proper channels."

The Head of the Senior School feels this attitude could be cultural to the school, and also feels that "some members of staff are afraid of parents. It's, I think cultural, here within the school."

### **Partnership with parents.**

Partnership with parents needs to be actively encouraged by schools, particularly those pursuing inclusivity in order to harness the knowledge, skills and resources that parents may bring to the school.

The Head of the Junior School, when she spoke of partnership with the parents, felt it is not only essential but is indeed one of the school's strongest inclusive characteristics:

"Partnership is essential in our schools. I mean the school has based everything on partnership, the educational mission is based on partnership, the founder together with the first brothers and then the brothers with the lay people and with the parents and with the teachers. It's by association, so that is something in principle you have always got to work towards" (Head of Junior School).

However, she goes on to explain that not only has being in partnership with parents to be worked upon, but it needs to be nurtured and one cannot become complacent:

“I think the partnership should be there, but you can never take anything for granted. A lot of teachers do work a lot in partnership on parents, but partnership even when you draw a contract has its limitations. Somebody says 20% for you and 80% for me, so that’s a partnership. A partnership is 50/50 I presume ... so everybody has to work towards an ideal amount of give and take sort of thing.”

The Head of Junior School went on to explain how she felt that there was a further need for improved communication channels between parents and the school: “...but again, I still feel that in that area, there’s still need for improvement, ways of listening to the parents more, ways of finding more time to have them involved.”

To add to the above, the Head of Senior School speaks about trust and partnership: “...funny moves by the parents are seen by the staff, and this doesn’t help communication or trust or partnership.” The Heads of the two sectors of the school have contrasting opinions on parent participation, however they both feel that the need for improved communication between parents, themselves and their staff, albeit to different degrees.

### **Parents discuss their concerns and expectations.**

In order for parents to discuss their concerns and expectation they need to be made welcome by the school even when they have come to air their concerns. The Head of Senior School explains that he has the same attitude towards all parents, however solutions to problems may differ:

“If we’re saying I’m being inclusive and there is one policy, I prefer not to prefer one group than the other. I would apply the same attitude in the same process to everybody in the process, whether a person has a statement or a report or doesn’t have a report.”

Parents can be demanding. “It’s not just accessibility to the school, but even sometimes too much, I would say excessive accessibility to certain individuals on the staff, you know at all times of the day, day or night, and here I’m not referring to LSAs necessarily.”

Parents air their concerns and expectations, and therefore are involved where their own children are concerned: “They are involved in decisions at the level of their child” (Head of Senior School).

Parental involvement through suggestions and opinions are acted upon in the Junior School, but in the Senior School parents are not part of the decision making process. “We listen, consider all the suggestions and then proceed from there, but do not consider suggestions as part of the decision making process itself” (Head of Senior School).

The Head of Junior School feels that parents are not listened to enough, but feels the need to get their opinions, values these opinions and acts upon them: “In my opinion, parents are not listened to enough. It’s risky listening to and accepting everybody’s opinion, but through our PTA we did have a couple of questionnaires, whenever we wanted an opinion from the parents.”

Parents’ requests and concerns are acted upon in the Junior School: “You can’t ignore parents’ requests and or concerns. If you hold a questionnaire and, well, at the end you have something, you’ve got a result from what the parents have said, you can’t ignore it” (Head of Junior School).

Sometimes schools can take parents’ knowledge for granted, and this may be a cause for parents not using the correct channels of communication.

“When we asked questions to the parents, we found out that we had taken for granted that parents had some information, so what we found out that there was a lack of information” (Head of Junior School).

The issues of concern for parents are varied, from curriculum to uniforms, from transport to discipline and bullying: ‘a little bit of everything’ (Interview with Head of Junior School). The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) is a platform in the school where parents can raise their concerns and expectations: “We happen to have a good group of people who give a lot of their time” (Head of Junior School).

The Head of the Senior School feels that, sometimes, being a member of the PTA leads to a certain amount of expectations on the part of the parent members and his feeling is that certain parents might take advantage of their positions: “...so strong on an individual basis, a member grabs a chair and joins a meeting during school time and these things are seen.”

The Head of the Junior School feels that the majority of parents leave the school in the hands of the staff, and she views this as an element of trust.

“Unfortunately parents don’t want to be on the PTA. It’s very hard to find PTA members, so even though we would like to know more about what they think, the parents they just in a way rely, they put all the trust in the school and they don’t want to put in their input.” (Head of Junior School).

## **Assessment and Evaluation (7)**

Assessment and evaluation can either hinder or help students’ learning processes and also result in long-term outcomes for students. Products of learning include assessments, the sitting of tests and examinations, but also go far beyond, to the application of learning for life. Although assessments, if used properly, are an important part of education,

and can indeed motivate students and assist them in their learning, they often lead to labelling and limit learning. In the Junior school there is continuous assessment, both formative and summative: “We’ve got continuous assessments the Junior School. Assessment is embedded in the curriculum, and so everything that is taught is checked” (Head of Junior School). Assessments are recorded and given to parents: “the result of the assessment is written down and that record is eventually given to the parents” (Head of Junior School)

In the Senior School there are half yearly and annual examinations, along with course work and assessments: “Teachers mainly, I would tend to say, assess through results” (Head of Senior School).

### **Assessing progress of students.**

Teacher observation is also a tool that is used to create a student profile in the Junior School: “A lot of observation goes on as well, our teachers are very good, they do a lot of observation, they’ve learnt how to analyze the children as a character, as a whole character, his ability, his social, his emotional” (Head of Junior School).

The Head of Senior School talks about the need to assess students at a skill based level but admits that this is not a strong point of the Senior School: “... at one level there is assessment vis-à-vis behaviour, vis-à-vis development of certain skills, but we are very weak there.”

### **Focus Groups Findings.**

There were four focus groups discussions with key members of the teaching staff that included assistant heads, year co-ordinators, class and subject teachers, and LSAs. Focus groups were voluntary and representative of the different members of teaching and support staff. Main themes elicited were diversity, teaching teams, working towards a common goal, the

advantages and disadvantages of teacher/class/subject LSA, teamwork, resources, the involvement of parents, monitoring and assessment, high expectations, and staff development and support.

**Table 25**  
**Themes Derived from Focus Groups**

Themes	Sub themes
1. Diversity in the classroom	1.1 Attitude 1.2 Mixed ability 1.3 Planning 1.4 Behaviour 1.5 Inclusive classroom strategies 1.6 Resources
2. Teaching Teams	2.1 Working together 2.2 Indicators of effective staff collaboration 2.3 Contact time between teacher and LSA 2.4 Meetings
3. Support Structures	3.1 LSA support 3.2 In class support 3.3 Accommodations, Adaptations, Differentiation 3.4 Peer support
4. Students' Characteristics	4.1 Effects on workload 4.2 Perceived effects on non-disabled students
5. Parental Involvement	5.1 Communication 5.2 Building collaboration with parents 5.3 Home-school links
Themes	Sub themes
6. Pedagogy and Positive Practice	6.1 Universal Design 6.2 Participation
7. Systematic Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation	7.1 Accommodations
8. Staff Development and Training	8.1 Reflective Practice

### **Diversity in the Classroom (1)**

Promoting the principle that all students are equal, and avoiding selection whilst respecting the natural variability in students, teachers together with LSAs, supported by administration, are responsible for delivering a mainstream National Minimum curriculum to a class of 26 students with a vast range of abilities, 24 non- disabled and two disabled

students with support entitlements: “Size, I mean classes, should be more reachable” (Focus group 3, male teacher).

The majority of teachers and parents tend to put smaller class size at the top of their wish list: “Less students in class; even 25 is too many sometimes. It depends on the class” (Focus group 2, male form coordinator).

Both the size of the class and the wide range of abilities in the same class are seen to be challenging by the teaching teams and highlight the importance for effective educational approaches to inclusive education to be employed in order to help all students access learning: “Mainly there are so many students that are not statemented that need help, and sometimes even more than the statemented child” (Focus group 1, female teacher).

### **Attitudes.**

Negative attitudes towards disabled students result in discrimination, prejudice and exclusion from school. A personal change process appears to be important for changing attitudes as part of the process for learning and teaching. Whilst participants of the focus groups exhibited a positive attitude vis-à-vis inclusive education, they did not always have realistic and informed opinions on the students that they came into contact with, and their use of language and actions did not always correspond to their ideologies. For example, placing the blame on the students rather than seeing what the teachers could be doing or were doing:

“As regards group work, I can do it with the kids in the Lab when there is a practical session, but how effective with some boys of 3 Blue, it is so and so some of them can’t follow proper instructions or proper handling of apparatus” (Focus group 2, female teacher)

A colleague supported this attitude with the following comment: “You’re entitled to danger money then!” (Male teacher). This attitude of leaving the problem with the student is not an isolated one. When speaking about participation a teacher explained:

“They do participate, but I had a problem with a student in 3 Yellow. He has a very low self-esteem and he refuses to speak in English during the English lesson, but I accept that, but even in Life Skills he just won’t, even if I do a Round Robin at the end of the lesson and everyone says something about the lesson, but he refuses. I am taking this as an example as he has a problem” (Focus group 2, female teacher).

There are a few teachers who feel that the disabled student is the responsibility of the LSA: “The facilitator [LSA] works with the statemented child” (Focus group 3, teacher). Another teacher explains: “The facilitator has so many students to look after” (Focus group 1, female teacher). Speaking about the extra work that comes along with including disabled students in the classroom, a teacher explains that “when the disabled students are working close to the facilitator, they don’t give trouble at all” (Focus group 3, female teacher). This again is a confirmation that the disabled student is left to the responsibility of the LSA.

### **Mixed ability.**

What is a “typical” classroom today? Teachers and LSA’s take on their respective roles in the knowledge that every class includes learners with different abilities and characteristics. Some students struggle, some students race ahead, some take learning in their stride, and all have different life experiences, personal learning preferences, and their own different interests. “When I go around and monitor, it’s really difficult, when some boys are way ahead and they finish, and the others haven’t even got out their file yet or opened their book on the right page yet” (Focus group 2, female teacher).



Heterogeneous grouping of students is a part and parcel of every classroom throughout the school from Grade 1 to Form 5. Students of the same age are together in mixed ability classrooms. Reference to the term mixed ability was repeated several times throughout the discussions of the focus groups. Having to reach a vast range of abilities is seen as a difficulty for the teaching teams. “I have brilliant students who get 90, 95 and I am speaking about physics, and then we have students who get hardly a 10, and that’s an enormous challenge” (Focus group 1, female teacher).

Interestingly, it’s not the disabled students who were considered the problem: “So what they’re saying is: it’s the mainstream subjects sometimes that are causing the problem, rather than the inclusion itself” (Focus group 1, LSA).

The same teacher, who spoke above about the disparity in marks between the students, repeated this sentiment: “No, definitely not inclusion” (Focus group 1, female teacher). In Focus Group 1 the participants felt that the unmotivated students were seen as a cause for concern, and the teaching teams found it very challenging to include them in lessons. They labelled this group “the weaker students”, and the teachers unanimously felt that in secondary school these students will benefit from a more flexible programme:

“If we talk about 5 Blue I can’t, it was all mainstream, 5 yellow we had one you know who was facilitated, just one, there wasn’t a problem, the problem was with others who were weak and needed another programme, probably to the three who were doing the paper A because maybe three, I had there with Paper A” (Focus group 1, female teacher).

In Malta, the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) consists of two papers in each subject offered in secondary school. Paper 1, which is taken by all students, falls within the ability range of all candidates and usually includes an aural, oral, practical and coursework component. Paper 2 entails

a choice of academic attainment levels to reflect different abilities. Teachers, together with Guidance teachers in the knowledge of their students' abilities and performance, are expected to advise them together with their parents whether to sit for paper 2A or 2B. However, the final decision rests with the student and his parents. Paper 2A is the more demanding of the two papers, and is even more demanding than Paper 1. It is aimed at those students who want to proceed to higher education. Paper 2B is less demanding than paper 1 and is designed for the less academically able students. Candidates have to indicate for which Paper 2 they wish to sit and are bound after registration date to keep to their choice of paper level. Sitting for Paper 1 and Paper 2A qualifies the successful candidate for Grades 1 to 4. Marks under Grade 4 are unclassified (U). Whilst sitting for Paper 1 followed by Paper 2B candidates may qualify for Grades 4 to 7. Grades under Grade 7 are unclassified (U). Grades 1 to 5 give students access to Sixth Form and Post Secondary Placement, while lower grades enable students to apply for a very limited number of foundation courses at the Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) and Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) or to enter the world of work.

Students attending the school in the study choose at the end of Form 3 the subjects they will be taking at SEC level and at the end of Form 4 they choose the level of the paper they are intending to sit for. Teachers' teaching approaches are influenced by their perception of their students' needs, abilities, behaviour and the requirements of the assessment and examination system. However, they find it difficult to practice them due to the lack of learning skills of the students, the passive and sometimes disruptive classroom behaviour, and the preoccupation with covering the curriculum and the gearing up to sitting for national examinations. To this end participants in Focus Group 1 are suggesting that they would adopt different pedagogical strategies if students were grouped according to Paper 2A or Paper 2B: "In Maths, we have reduced this problem of mine a bit, we are already a bit divided and it has worked out better" (Focus group 1, female

teacher). She goes on to explain how students were selected for the different groupings:

“The boys together with their parents, because sometimes you don’t agree, we always have six student, who make their own decisions. At least it’s six students. A student who gets a 40 or a 30 in the annual, but his parents or the private lesson teacher says he is good for paper 2A. You can’t do that, and you can’t refuse. But at least it’s in place, and it’s there to protect the students and helps mixed ability teaching” (Focus group 1, female teacher).

There was consensus by the group as a whole: ‘Definitely’ (Focus Group 1). Students have been selected from Form 3 for MATSEC Paper 2A or 2B through discussions with parents and the student themselves, and the marks they obtained in their annual exams are used as a guide. The participants felt that enabling students to make the choice between the two papers offers them empowerment and control over their lives.

### **Planning.**

The need for regular meetings between teacher and LSA was a bone of contention not between themselves but with the administration. The teaching teams felt that these meetings should be timetabled for, as explained by Form 3 English subject LSA:

“I think one of the main problems is to find time to speak to the teachers themselves, to see what’s happening, what lesson is going to take place, etc, etc. Many, many times you just have to improvise during the lesson itself” (Focus Group 2, male English subject LSA).

E-mails seem to be the main mode of communication between teachers and LSAs, as stated by the Form 3 Maltese subject LSA in response to clarification on her having enough time to meet in order to plan for resources: “No, she sends me things by email” (Focus group 2, Form 3 Maltese subject LSA). In Senior School the limited contact time with the subject teachers was felt due to back-to-back core lessons and timetabling difficulties as explained by a maths subject LSA: “Maths, for example, has three different teachers this year and a lot of lessons clashed. I wasn’t able to go in for all the lessons, so someone else had to take over some of these lessons and so my contact time with the teacher is very very limited” (Focus group 2, math subject LSA).

However, in the Junior School the teaching teams have some lessons that they can use for planning, plus the very fact that they are in class all day and together for some breaks gives them some time for planning; but even then they feel it could be more: “not enough time to prepare for the adaptations” (Focus group 4, female LSA).

### **Behaviour.**

Participants of the focus groups all felt that the behaviour of students affects the strategies they use or decide against using in their classrooms. “The behaviour sort of makes you think twice to experiment. I use audio, PowerPoint presentations and OHPs” (Focus group 2, male teacher).

Participants felt restricted in how to group the students for class activities by a variety of factors which included the size of the group, the time and length of the lesson, and the behaviour and motivation of the class: “The Form 1’s are more disruptive than last year’s, so I preferred not to. If I had a quiet class I would do it” (Focus group 3, female teacher).

Behaviour that is seen as disruptive is described as showing off behaviour, talking out loud or constantly talking: “I am talking about ... his

voice is loud when he talks. Not just his voice, he does not stop talking, he likes to show off”(Focus group 3, female teacher).

Also, calling students by their name during class explanation in order to gain their attention is seen as disruptive to the lesson by some teachers: “You have students who you have to keep on drawing their attention to the lesson, you know, like pay attention, stop talking” (Focus group 3, female teacher).

The grouping together of disruptive students was strongly rejected both by teachers and LSAs: “in one red, since they are a group at the back, they become disrupted” (Focus group 3, female teacher). An LSA explained her views on the grouping of disruptive students: “For the facilitator it’s hard to have them altogether, putting all the difficult students together” (Focus group 3, LSA).

In Focus Group 4 the teaching teams spoke about using specific programmes and strategies to address behaviour:

“Some students I have worked with have been very noisy and disruptive in class. Many would argue that this is unfair to the students who want to listen and work. I argue that through my experience I have observed that with the correct programmes in place, like a P.P.P. (Peer Preparation Programme), children learn to ignore certain behaviours and keep on working. This strategy benefits all kids in class” (Focus group 4, grade 5 class LSA (1)).

Having support in class from the LSA was seen to promote positive behaviour and help towards classroom management: “the LSA helps with the management of the whole class, the correction of the boys during lessons” (Focus Group 4, Class Teacher).

### **Inclusive classroom strategies.**

Teachers and LSAs, with their combined skills in pedagogy, curriculum and support, are a key factor for quality learning, successful student outcomes and quality lessons. The French subject teacher spoke about using group work: "I use group work and, for example, one should have more time like in French, I have included role models in class and things like that for vocabulary" (Focus group 2, male language teacher). Whilst another teacher, teaching in Form 3, explained her difficulties with doing group work: "For English I find group work impossible, the most I do is pair work. I feel I lose the students, so the most I do is pair work" (Focus group 2, female English teacher).

In Focus Group 3 a teacher spoke about her teaching strategies and her awareness of different learning styles:

"Talking about resources and teaching strategies, I mean the normal brainstorming before you start a topic, for instance, and then you move on to the constructive approach, that's what I use most in my lessons both in Maths and in Science, the use of ICT to reach those students who do not manage to understand simply by reading, which are most students basically, even myself I prefer seeing pictures than rather just text books" (Focus group 3, female maths and science teacher).

However, using group work was not a strategy she implemented, and she gave her reason: "because you get a lot of disruption from most of the class" (Focus group 3, female teacher).

## **Resources.**

The participants spoke about the need for additional in-class support. They thought that with additional support and cooperation between the teaching teams and the administration inclusion in practice would be realized and would be beneficial for all. "The best situation would be that there would be two teachers in the same class, two teachers and one facilitator (LSA). There is a school in Italy that works like that" (Focus group 3, female teacher). Another teacher agreed with her colleague and explained how she thought it would work: "Yes, it would be perfect, one teacher explains and the other works with the students, and then the facilitator works with the statemented student" (Focus group 3, female teacher).

Another teacher mentioned the need for more support: "If we could get more help in the classroom, to reach everyone" (Focus group 3, female teacher). The focus group as a whole supported the views of the need for more support: 'Yes definitely' (Focus Group 3). In the primary school there are three adults in sixteen out of the eighteen classes. Grade 6 has a class LSA and a subject LSA: "Having a subject facilitator (LSA) works well. We have a planning lesson every Thursday, it is a double lesson, the facilitator (LSA) knows what to do and lessons are planned together" (Focus group 4, female teacher).

## **Teaching Teams (2)**

Inclusion is a dynamic process of participation of people within a team of players. It implies reciprocity. Teaching teams are synonymous with this school and are very much a part of the practice and learning support provision of the entire school. The general feeling from the participants was that establishing teaching teams has resulted in more students being reached on an individual basis: "It does help, it needs to be more" (Focus group 3, female teacher). Having the roles of the teacher and LSA clearly defined and understood by everyone is seen as important to both teachers

and LSAs in the primary school: “having clearly defined roles helps prevent the misinterpretation of roles” (Focus group 4, female class teacher). Having knowledge of the LSA’s role supports effective inclusive practice and all the students gain from the LSA’s presence in class: “Closer to all the children, all the class, especially during class work we both go around checking and helping the students” (Focus group 4, female class teacher). An LSA reaffirms: “to help the teacher reach all the boys” (Focus group 4, class LSA).

However, some teachers in Focus Group 1 felt that even with established teaching teams there were still some students whose learning needs were still not being addressed: “There were many other children who needed help” (Focus group 1, male coordinator). Also, in the same focus group a difficulty was noted when LSAs were not consistent in their work ethics:

“I want consistency, because I will think about my class, I will probably continue doing the adapted notes, which I thought of at the beginning of the year and let me work with that, you know, I want consistency in my class, popping in and out of class” CHECK (Focus group 1, female physics teacher).

### **Working together.**

Speaking about working in a team: “People are individuals and you never have an ideal situation, you have to take the good and the bad; after all, we are here for the children” (Focus group 4, class LSA).

Individual attitudes towards working as a team in the classroom is seen as critical to teachers and LSAs working together to meet the needs of all the students in the class:

“If you feel that the administration above accepts us, the teachers will accept you much more, it’s more individual in the



sense the person has to accept it” (Focus group 3, female LSA).

The system of in class support needs to be accepted by all the teachers:

“...not to generalize, but some of them are new teachers or old teachers who accept the system, whereas some of them who have been working teaching here for 12, 13 years, they couldn’t be bothered, but they are teachers who have been teaching for a long time” (Focus group 3, female LSA).

To work together as a team one has to respect one another’s role and experience, as emphasized by one of the participants: “I respect ... she has a lot more experience than I have, and we respect each other’s position” (Focus group 3, female teacher). Working with an LSA helps with the running of the class as explained by a teacher: “Three adults in class gives us more individual time with the boys, it also helps support positive classroom behaviour” (Focus group 4, female class teacher).

Working together as explained by a subject LSA: “... as regards to Maltese, I have the topics beforehand and I prepare the stuff. I check them out with the teacher, then I work accordingly to what’s being done in the class” (Focus group 2, subject LSA).

### **Indicators of effective staff collaboration.**

Collaboration and cooperation together with the reversal of roles is a clear indicator of effective teamwork between staff: “Working together as a teaching team works well, saved energy, planning done together, the facilitator (LSA) knows what to do, adaptations are always ready” (Focus group 4, grade 6 Class teacher).

Subject LSAs, who were confident both with the subject they were supporting and with the teacher/s teaching that subject, demonstrated an ability to be flexible and to improvise:

“I ask them what is happening like if it is *The Tale of Two Cities*, the notes are prepared and the students have them for the lesson. If work is given I see if it needs to be adapted, it is usually there and then” (Focus Group 3, male English subject LSA).

Continuity of working together: “... all I have is one class of English, I mean I had two last year and one this year I worked with ... both years and I mean we work well together. I appreciate your presence in class, we work well together, we give each other feedback” (Focus Group 3, English subject teacher).

Knowing the teacher and the teacher’s teaching style, having knowledge of the subject and the building up of resources, are all indicators of effective collaboration between the teaching teams. “I knew you were doing this and that and I needed to know more, but this year; once I knew what she was going to do, I mean the curriculum was the same, same books. The things were there” (Focus group 3, male subject LSA).

Discussing students together and coming up with a joint strategy is also evidence of effective collaboration: “I had told ... [English Subject LSA] we had discussed it, it is better if we see what he is capable of doing” (Focus group 3, English subject teacher). The whole school staff are supporting one another in their decisions and not undermining decisions taken by the teaching team. “Enhanced liaison between the class team and the other teaching staff, so that, for example, the latter won’t have interferences from other adults in the school, when a discipline strategy is in place” (Focus Group 4, grade 5 female teacher).

### **Contact time between teacher and LSA.**

A successful teaching team requires time together in order to carry out their daily teaching activities ensuring that all students learn together, whilst offering a continuum of support to match the entitlements of the disabled student. Although contact time between the teachers and the LSAs varies between Junior School and Secondary School and between year groups, the issue of time constraints was a recurrent theme throughout the Focus Groups. “I find there is also a lack of contact hours between the team. Most of our discussions and decisions take place after school hours” (Focus group 4, grade 5 LSA (1)).

Also, in the same Focus Group, one of the subject teachers explained how planning time was used: “...,always use planning time to plan together for the different support needs, pushed to get the adaptations in order to check them, need more time to check adaptations” (Focus Group 4, female teacher).

Another teacher explained how she utilized and made do with the time she has available.

“I find a lack of time to speak to the facilitators. We have, if you look at the timetable, my free lessons are not free because I have other things on. You have to find time because even at the weekend to communicate and we send emails to each other, we send sms’s to each other, we grab a moment when we walk down the corridor or wait or wait for the teacher to come out of the class to ask something. During the lesson itself I try my best, if there is some work assigned, to talk to the facilitator (LSA) and we have a word during the lesson, it is working fine in my case” (Focus Group 3, female math teacher).

Unanimously, teachers and LSA throughout the focus groups wanted planned meetings aimed around their students: “Ideally the class team would

have some time to meet and discuss in more detail students' development" (Focus group 4, female class teacher).

### **Meetings.**

The need for the LSAs to attend curriculum and planning meetings was felt across the board by the LSAs: "...but there is a need for us to meet with the subject team, but we need a free lesson in order to be able to attend" (Focus group 3, female subject LSA).

Meetings for the teachers are timetabled, so are MAPs sessions and IEP meetings. "Everybody knows that we are subject facilitators, and so if there is a subject meeting why aren't we present, and you want to have us?" (Focus group 3, female subject LSA). The Year Coordinator in Focus Group 3 expressed her views:

"But there is the need that they have meetings with us, like we have meetings between ourselves, subject meetings, they have, for example, with the year tutor, with the form tutor, they would be present also for that meeting, that means they will have that lesson free where we could all meet as a whole team" (Year Coordinator in Focus Group 3).

Participants were unanimous in their opinion with regard to the need to timetable meeting slots, where the whole team could meet. All meetings need to be timetabled with the LSAs in mind as well as the teachers in order to free LSA's so they can attend their subject meeting. In Senior School, to cut down on meeting time, a file is passed around with student information the administration thinks teachers should be aware of:

"...and there is a thing called a red file. It is the file of students that is passed around to the teachers, it's called a procedure. The thing is, if we had meetings and discussed each child, it's

much better than passing round a file (Focus group 1, form coordinator).

### **Support Structures (3)**

The effect and significance of support structures in respect to both disabled and non-disabled students should be of concern to all members of staff pertaining to inclusive practices within the school. Support is seen as being the right fit for the student when he can work alongside his peers as a part of the class. “He followed the lesson, stayed quiet, but he wants to have something to do during the lesson, it was perfect” (Focus group 3, female maths teacher).

### **Learning Support Assistant -Support.**

In this school support by the LSA is differentiated at different school levels: in primary school the LSAs are class based with the exception of Grade 6, where there are two LSAs per class, one being class based and the other being subject based in preparation for the boys’ transition into Senior School. In Senior School all LSAs are subject based. The LSA is seen as a support to the teachers as stated in Focus Group 1: “The facilitators are a support of course for us” (Focus group 1, physics teacher).

Participants felt that continuity of LSAs support is important both for the students and for the teaching team, as explained by the English teacher: “So it is important, if there is only one facilitator (LSA) she would always be continually available for my lesson, so we keep a constant situation”(Focus group 3, female English teacher).

This ties in with the immediate support teachers feel they need from the LSAs in order to reach the whole class. In Focus Group 1 teachers were upset with LSAs’ lack of consistency with being present for lessons, as

explained by the chemistry teacher: “5 Green that there were people who needed a facilitator, but there were no facilitators” (Focus group 1, female chemistry teacher).

Another concern aired in Focus Group 1 was the lack of support they felt they received from the LSA: “He sat in class, yes, he sat in class” (Focus group 1, physics teacher). It was also noted that at times the role of the LSA is seen as needed just for the disabled student: “There was ... [disabled student] but he was absent most of the year” (Focus group 1, female physics teacher). Although said very apologetically, a teacher in Focus Group 3 mentioned that having someone else explaining to a student is distracting; her statement was not challenged: “Something else which disrupts me a bit, is when the LSAs are explaining to a student. If they could lower their voices” (Focus group 3, female English teacher).

In Focus Group 4 it was noted by a Grade 5 Class Teacher that LSAs in class encourage student participation: “the LSAs’ support enhances their participation” (Focus Group 4, Grade 5 Class Teacher). LSAs are also supportive during group work, as explained by the same teacher: “The LSA would need to join the group in which the student with IEN [disabled] student is participating, to monitor and boost the child’s participation in the group” (Focus group 4, grade 5 female class teacher).

The English subject LSA in Grade 6 explains her role during group work: “when the teacher allocates the group, I make sure that the statemented students are involved” (Focus Group 4, English Subject LSA).

### **In class support.**

Instructional support is lead by the class teacher and supported by the LSAs.

Throughout the Primary classes and Forms 1 and 2 all support is given in class by the teaching teams:

“Considering that all children have their strengths and weaknesses, and that those students with a statement are allocated LSAs to assist them with class work, sometimes I dedicate more attention to other students who would need one-to-one attention to perform better in school” (Focus group 4, grade 5 female class teacher).

It is interesting to note that creating independent learning opportunities to give the disabled student autonomy and reduce dependency and labelling is important, as explained by a Grade 1 teacher: “This can be achieved only if the teacher, along with the LSAs, truly envisages an inclusive classroom and makes sure that the LSA is not all the time next to the IEN [Disabled] student” (Focus group 4, grade 1 female class teacher).

The English subject LSA also speaks about the need to empower disabled students’ learning by getting supporting levels right. “We are sometimes giving too much help, and as a result not helping boys become independent. I believe that more tangible help in class to help access the curriculum is sometimes better” (Focus group 4, grade 6 English subject LSA).

In the higher Forms, that is from Form 3, there is flexibility, and individual support is given in the form of pre tasks and post tasks. This support is given both on an individual basis and, sometimes, in small groups of two to four students. Ideally the support is by the subject facilitator, for the particular subject the disabled student is being supported in, and it takes place outside class during a lesson the student has dropped. There was concern in Focus Group 1 that providing disabled students with one to one instruction or a different programme results in leaving classes without in class support from the LSA. The Maltese subject LSA explains:

“... this year was very difficult for us because we had so many differentiated programmes. In fact, in Maltese I myself was only in one class because ... [Disabled Student], for example, didn’t

even take Maltese, so I wasn't even in Yellow, I was just in one class." (Focus group 1, Maltese female subject LSA).

The lack of time available for reviewing lessons with students was felt both in Senior School and in Junior School, as commented upon by a Grade 5 LSA: "... we are not giving all the students the time to put into practice what they have learnt, as we would soon have to jump onto another chapter/topic" (Focus group 4, Class LSA (1)).

Interestingly, MAPs and IEPs were really not a focal point of any of the Focus Groups. In Focus Group 4 the assistant head referenced them:

"For the statemented student everything is planned, IEP at the beginning of the year and MAPs at the end of the year. MAPs and IEPs are built in to school provisions, and time is dedicated to the holding of these meetings. But we might not always achieve, there are always limitations, we have to work within the parameters available" (Focus group 4, assistant head).

### **Accommodations, adaptations, differentiation.**

The participants of the focus groups showed both knowledge and an understanding of the purpose behind curricula modification. The assistant head in focus group 4 spoke about her thoughts on adaptations and how she feels they are restricting students: "...we are adapting and differentiating the curriculum; then we expect those boys to fit into those adaptations. We expect those students to fit in that pigeonhole!"

She goes on to explain her rationale: "I check the adaptations of Maltese, there may be a teacher/LSA who knows the needs, but that is the minority, not the majority."

However, a Grade 1 teacher talks about adapting the curriculum to suit the student's learning: "Adapting curriculum to their level" (Focus Group 4, Grade 1 Class Teacher). Another teacher speaks about checking the LSA



adaptations: “Checking LSA's adaptations” (Focus group 4, grade 6 English female subject teacher). This is elaborated on by the English subject LSA: “...preparing various levels of adaptations takes lots of time. Looking for the correct picture to go with a certain text” (Focus group 4, grade 6 English female subject LSA).

A teacher in the same focus group speaks about the time it takes to check the adaptations, demonstrating teacher responsibility: “I feel pushed to get the adaptations and spend time on checking them” (Focus group 4, grade 6 female math teacher). One to one teaching given by the LSA after the teacher’s explanation is seen as another important support: “... giving a second/different explanation of some concepts and maybe even providing more flashcards or tangible items” (Focus group 4, grade 6 English subject LSA).

In Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 the participants speak about adapted notes, one to one support, but students in class are seen to be following the mainstream:

“Many, many times you just have to improvize, but certain things cannot really be adapted, if they fall in the mainstream. For example, English language grammar points cannot be changed, so it’s the same work, if they are following the mainstream curriculum” (Focus group 2, male English subject LSA).

Adapted notes help a number of students with their revision; the structure of the notes helps in memorization: “We do in Maltese. Last year I had a number of students who asked for facilitators’ notes; mainstream students, yes, it’s very helpful they said. They help us in revision” (Focus group 1, male Maltese teacher).

Teachers are less likely to be involved in a direct teaching role if the disabled student is following a differentiated programme:

“...why, not with everybody but with quite a good number. Why if I am working on differentiated work, you’re not following exactly what the teacher is doing, why should I always be the one to go to the teacher and explain what I’ve done or what I will be doing, and sometimes you get the shock there” (Focus group 3, female teacher).

### **Peer support.**

One of the biggest resources the school has to support the disabled student is his non-disabled peers, and there are gains for both: “...students are willing to help out. Over a period of time students show an improvement in their interactive styles towards the statemented student” (Focus group 4, grade 5 female class LSA (2)).

The use of strategies, such as peer tutoring, co-operative group learning and team projects, benefit all students and prevents social isolation: “are not shunned by their peers” (Focus group 4, grade 6 female English subject LSA). “We make sure that boys are working well, and not fighting or arguing. (Focus group 4, female English subject teacher). A participant describes her input in co-operative group work and student participation:

“I do my very best to involve all students during group work. Students may contribute verbally through discussion, creatively by producing a drawing or by acting. However, their participation is not always the maximum one would expect. If group work involves a hands-on activity; then. I should say. success rate would be 8 to 9 on 10. If group work involves a discussion - 6 to 7 on 10” (Focus group 4, grade 5 class LSA (2)).

Peer tutoring working in pairs is used successfully, as explained by a participant in Focus Group 1:

“Computer studies, I did organize it sort of, it comes natural in the system I had ... [disabled student] who stayed with ... [non-disabled] student who is good at computers, and it did work very well. Finding someone with whom they can stay and they can work with is the key” (Focus group 1, male computer science teacher).

In class, participation is encouraged and achieved through after school peer collaboration as explained by a Form 1 language teacher:

“Every Monday I like to have group presentation in class. I assign this work during the weekend, the parents help a lot as well, they like, because the student can look for pictures himself and then he can come out and talk about it and keep their chart their creation, their model, whatever, and I encourage them to talk, I involve them, the class enjoys Monday” (Focus group 3, Form 1 English/Italian female subject Teacher).

#### **Students’ Characteristics (4)**

Disabled students represent an especially vulnerable group in society, both in the community and more particularly in educational institutions they attend. The school being studied, as we have read, has the Mission to accommodate individuals with different characteristics, and has the responsibility to support the disabled student to gain the ability by providing him with an appropriate education and training to do and to be what he aspires to, whilst providing opportunities for him to adapt and therefore meet the schools expectations. Each and every disabled student will have individual accommodations that need meeting, and not meeting these needs is discriminatory practice: “It’s usually there and then I adapt. It’s not very easy to adapt” (Focus group 2, male English Subject LSA).

### **Effects on workload.**

Including disabled students was originally sold to schools, and more particularly to teachers, in Malta as accepting the disabled student in their classroom. The teachers were told that the disabled student was to be accompanied by someone to take care of him. So they were asked to be nothing more to the disabled student than a gracious host, and accepting this student in class was not going to make a difference to their workload. This position has changed, but the attitude does still persist, but fortunately only in a minority of secondary teachers at this school: “but it’s very much as you said, the talk after the lesson of your part you know” (Focus group 2, Male English subject teacher) followed by: “More on the part of the LSAs” (Focus Group 2, the teachers). Other teachers did mention the extra things that they do to include disabled students in class, and interestingly a Grade 1 teacher works on accommodations, adaptations and differentiating the learning of the class to include the disabled student where and when as needed:

“Adapting curriculum to their level, giving a second/different explanation of some concepts and maybe even providing more flashcards or tangible items. Also, maybe preparing and following a separate programme that suits more the IEN student” (Focus group 4, grade 1 female class teacher).

One of the teachers in focus group 2, who voiced his opinion and stated that any extra work needed to accommodate the disabled learner in class is usually up to the LSA, went on to say what in fact he prepared as a matter of course:

“There are the particular needs, there are students needing increased fonts, the comprehension is done, but you have to increase it, you know not just for an exam or test, the everyday work and others need visuals and colour” (Focus group 2, male English subject teacher).

A Grade 5 teacher explains the extra work she feels she has to do, and this was representative of the participants in Focus group 4:

“More planning and preparation - having to learn alternative methods like Numicon. Forecast any problems that might arise in school assemblies and act accordingly. The need for adaptations to be done and to be checked by the teacher. There are times when there are more than three or four versions per lesson. Discussing ways to adapt work. Facing dilemmas with the classroom like, for example, having to ignore negative behaviour in class, while it may be disruptive for the rest of the class” (Focus group 4, grade 5 female class teacher).

### **Perceived effects on non-disabled students.**

Categorization and labelling of individual characteristics define the perceptions and expectations both of the non-disabled and the disabled students. A participant from Focus group 4 felt there were some difficulties with acceptance at first, and gave her reasons:

“Some of the children especially at first find it difficult to accept IEN [disabled] students as part of the class for the reason that maybe they might disturb the class towards the beginning of school. However, this is quickly forgotten by the students. By the end of the first month they start accepting them as part of the group. Most of them become best friends in fact, since they feel good helping the IEN students and enjoy having them as their friends” (Focus group 4, grade 1 class teacher).

This caring relationship is seen as something positive and is mentioned by other participants in the same focus group: “A positive effect - students are willing to help out, over a period of time students show an

improvement in their interactive styles towards the student with IEN” (Focus group 4, grade 5 female LSA (2)).

Another effect mentioned is behaviour, but again this was mentioned as being positive in so much that the participants thought it helps the non-disabled student to learn about acceptance: “Sometimes they can be disruptive, but at the same time they learn to accept everyone” (Focus group 4, grade 6 English subject teacher). The English subject LSA supports what the teacher said and also speaks about the added noise, when the LSA has to speak to the disabled student, and the effect this has on the class and on the teacher: “Sometimes talking one to one can disrupt other boys and the teacher. However, it is a learning experience for everyone, and boys learn to be tolerant” (Focus Group 4, grade 6 English subject LSA). Interestingly, one of the participants mentioned the fact that a disabled student can be a very clever student: “If the child is very intelligent, can help, or as a class we learn from his knowledge, which is positive” (Focus group 4, grade 1 female LSA (2)).

Whilst in Focus group 2 the participants felt that the presence of disabled students has a positive effect on non-disabled students: “Raises an awareness that there is diversity in life” (Focus group 2, male subject LSA), another line of thought that was discussed by participants in the other focus groups was that the non-disabled students make a difference between students whom they considered disabled or non-disabled through appearances and behaviour: “I think students make a difference between children who have a visible disability, for example Down syndrome. They are kinder to this student than any other difficulty” (Focus group 2, male form 3 coordinator). The other disabled students are thought of as non-disabled: “those students who have no physical features, but have an impairment, are treated like any other student” (Focus group 2, male form 3 coordinator).

## **Parental Involvement (5)**

Parent participation is considered to be a vital component in the education of disabled students. In Focus group 4 the assistant head feels strongly about parents' involvement: "MAPs and IEPs are an example of where time is dedicated to the statemented student parents" (Focus Group 4, Assistant Head Junior School). Later on she explains how the school listens to the parents' perspective:

"Parents of the statemented boys are involved in decisions regarding their own son; we give them time to talk, not that we always do what the parent wants. We are in agreement between the school, administration, parents and the teaching team" (Focus group 4, female assistant head Junior School).

## **Communication.**

Most parents know that their son will benefit if they continue to support their son's learning at home, but they need to know the "what" and the "how" of the teaching teams' goals for their child. A teacher explains her views on communicating with parents:

"I believe it is vital that parents know what the children are doing at school and the methods that are being used to work out a concept. Children's learning does not only happen at school but also outside during their outings with their parents, so it is important that parents are aware of certain teaching methods so as to carry on building on the education that their child is getting from school" (Focus group 4, grade 1 female class teacher).

In the same focus group a teacher explained how she involves the parents: "I am open to communicate with them, be it face-to-face, on the

school phone, through the children's diary or through e-mail as well as through meetings" (Grade 5 female class teacher). She goes on to say that she feels communication with parents is fundamental to a students' well being: "100 % - an imperative move to the child's social and academic education."

### **Building collaboration with parents.**

Collaborating with parents makes school staff e comfortable in their knowledge and not afraid of parental knowledge. The assistant head in Focus group 4 explains her views:

"Depends on relationships, compatibility. I am more relaxed with some parents, but sometimes I feel I have to keep my distance from others. In the case of some parents there is a detachment from their side and perhaps also from my side. Some parents follow a hierarchy. Parents and teaching teams have very healthy partnership, and this is supported by administratio." (Assistant head in focus group 4).

There was a general feeling for the need for parents to be more cooperative: "Parents should be cooperative, because not all the parents are cooperative" (Focus group 2, male English teacher).

When it comes to the sitting of examinations, teachers feel parents need to listen and respond to their professional advice:

"I feel that I am the professional in the class and I know the student in that year. If he worked for Paper A, he would do Paper A, and if he did not work enough, he would go for Paper B. And his mother will not come and tell me that the Private lessons teacher wants him in A, and the school has to submit to these things and put him in A. And since I am the teacher here



and have to do what they tell me, I will teach him” (Focus group 1, female maths subject teacher).

The English subject LSA demonstrates how she has built up a more personal relationship with the parents: “I messaged all the parents on the eve of each exam and told them to wish their children good luck, and they all told me it’s encouraging that we have a more personal relationship” (Focus group 1, English subject LSA).

One way of collaborating with parents is by involving them in the teaching of their child. A participant forwards the following week’s projections, so parents are not only informed but they can prepare their son for the coming week: “Sending a weekly e-mail to the parents with the weekly plan” (Focus group 4, grade 6 female English subject LSA).

### **Home school links.**

Parents have an understanding that they can come to school before the start of the school day, if they have any concerns: “we meet parents before school” (Focus group 4, assistant head). Another home school link are the MAPs sessions and the IEP meetings: “We have MAPs and IEP meetings and you’re invited to both MAPs and IEPs; it’s on the notice board always” (Focus group 1, Maltese female subject LSA).

In Grade 1, the Class LSA explains how the teaching team works with parents:

“Through the frequent sharing of information regarding the children’s progress. When new topics are learnt, we share tools that we used in class, so that parents may reinforce at home. We have recently started using a website that keeps parents up to date with topics covered during a week” (Focus group 4, grade 1 female class LSA).

A Grade 5 teacher creates home school communication through the school diary. This is the normal procedure of daily communication with the parents: “Keeping them informed about what is going on in the class through the students’ diary, provide them with notes where necessary like, for example, maths notes to explain new mathematical methods” (Focus group 4, Grade 5 female class teacher).

### **Pedagogy and Positive Practice (6)**

Schools that are best for all non-disabled students are also the best for disabled students. The assistant head in Focus group 4 explained: “Academically I do check that decisions taken are put into practice and not left on paper.” All the students are members of a Class, Year or Form irrespectively of ability or impairment. “As for the child, through my experience, I have observed that each child likes to belong. Therefore, participation from the child’s end is usually very positive” (Focus group 4, grade 5 female class LSA (1)).

### **Universal design.**

Universal Design for learning is the signature of all professional educators. All the participants were knowledgeable about interesting, effective pedagogical approaches and the principles of Universal Design together with its implementation at the multiple means of representation stage: “...basically, different strategies like the use of visuals, PowerPoint” (Focus group 2, male language teacher). This is how a Grade 1 LSA engages with the principles of Universal Design for learning and translates it into classroom practice:

“At times work needs to be prepared on a differentiated level, abiding to the class topic to keep the child focused on the

teacher's explanation and class discussion. Activities related to the topic to keep the child busy if needed. Extra sets of visuals for individual use during explanation. Preparing activities that will include all children irrespective of their ability can sometimes be challenging, but through strong team work, planning in advance and sharing of ideas we manage to prepare activities/lessons that appeal to the whole class" (Focus group 4, grade 1 female class LSA).

A teacher in the same Focus group also spoke about visuals and making a conscious commitment towards the appreciation of different learners: "Flashcards need to be prepared beforehand to help boys who are non-verbal answer teachers' questions in class, giving them a choice of 2 answers" (Grade 6 English subject teacher).

A maths and science teacher confirms her use of Universal Design: "... a lot of graphics, visual presentations, if there is a video even better, because you have some visual as well, PowerPoint, computer, programmes in Maths, simulations in science" (Focus group 3, math/science teacher).

In the same Focus group the French and Social Studies teacher also confirmed using Universal Design:

"In my case I use a lot of project work, a lot of visuals or pictures, computer as well as DVDs, games, drama, acting, singing and music. I try to involve them a lot, it works very well with the weaker students and the statemented students and the LSA" (Focus group 3, female teacher).

### **Participation.**

There are many ways how to participate in class, and student diversity needs to be respected: "all teaching teams and administration try to engage

them in everything, this is a priority” (Focus group 4, assistant head). In the same Focus group an LSA explains: “All students are asked to participate, irrelevant of their ability in the subject – the expectation of the child’s output will vary according to the child’s academic level” (Grade 1 class LSA).

Student engagement both in school activities and in class is greatly influenced by the schools’ and adults’ expectations:

“As a school I believe we have come a long way, but I still believe there is room for improvement in areas, such as the school is not fully accessible, staff members are not always supportive, some people tend to become barriers, and a lack of organisation. Students who need a routine need to know from beforehand what is happening. When things change drastically, we are excluding each and every student who will not be able to handle the change in timetable. Due to these problems and other daily similar ones, we do not give the child the chance to fully participate in all activities” (Focus group 4, Grade 5 female LSA).

This was confirmed further by one of the assistant heads:

“There are loopholes in certain subjects. Art, sometimes we include the boy just for the sake of including him; if we use our imagination more, the engagement would be more fruitful. Engagement is how we include the disabled student, and also has to do with the student” (Assistant head, Focus group 4).

A teacher in the same Focus group also thought an element lies with the student themselves and the support they receive: “The level of participation depends on the student’s eagerness and willingness to participate in class; furthermore, the LSAs support enhances their participation” (Grade 5 female teacher).

## **Systematic Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (7)**

The assistant head in Focus group 4 spoke about the evaluative measures in place in the Junior School: “Formative assessments, IEPs and MAPs and informal meetings between administration and teachers.” The Grade 5 team mention the evaluative measures that are in place in their class: “Discussion within the class team, assessments both practical and written, observation of students during class work, and the MAPs report at the end of the year also gives an evaluation of the child’s improvements” (Focus group 4, grade 5 teaching team).

A Grade 1 teacher also talks about assessment:

“Children are assessed during lessons by answering the questions given. They are also assessed indirectly even during group/pair work. They are also asked individually to reply to some questions related to what is being taught. Also, sometimes they are asked to fill in a handout related to the topics being covered” (Focus Group 4, Grade 1 female class teacher).

The LSA in the same teaching team added to this: “Points scheme for results of group work. Individual points card for special effort or performance, comparing and discussing in pairs to lead to self-evaluations, individual assessments, revisiting of topic” (Focus group 4, grade 1 class LSA).

Although evaluation methods in the Senior School are centred on examinations, teachers do use varied tools to evaluate students learning: “Exams, test, feedback during the lessons” (Focus group 1, male computer science teacher). Another teacher in the same focus group mentions practicals: “I get a lot of feedback from the practical sessions as well” (Female chemistry teacher).. Another teacher mentions class work: “even in class during a discussion you get a lot of feedback, discussion, correction, everything. How interested is he” (Male Maltese teacher).

## **Accommodations.**

Accommodations should match the support given in everyday classroom learning. The disabled student's IEP reflects any accommodations that will be used in assessments of examinations.

It is evident that there are indeed some challenges with providing students with accommodations and adaptations in the secondary section of the school and more especially from Form 3, as the year coordinator expresses when he gives his views:

"It's a hot issue throughout the school. Do you agree with that? A hot issue! Since I taught in the Junior School as well, I am not talking about the statemented student. I am talking about the other bracket, students in general. There is a bracket of students who have gone to grade one and grade two or three to grade 6 to Form 1 and Form 2 having adapted perhaps papers and what have you and now in Form 3 they stopped because they don't have the same support, which I understand and I agree with fully. My issue is a fact that it wasn't stopped before" (Focus group 2, male form 3 coordinator).

There was also some uncertainty for providing the student with the necessary accommodations before the final approval from the examination board had been received by the school:

"It depends. I teach Forms 3, 4 and 5, if they are going to have accommodations, but why should I include it now? What comes first and you can always implement them, when the MATSEC Board has granted the accommodations – update" (Focus group 2, male environmental teacher).

There was also some indifference around the academic attainment for those students not being prepared for MATSEC: "You still think we should be setting some form of assessment to see how they are getting along" (Focus

group 3, female math subject LSA). The Coordinator argued that ideally there would be different systems in place for students who were not on the MATSEC route. “In an ideal world, if we had resources, which we don’t have, they would have a totally different programme for example for a language it would be on a functional level” (Focus group 2, Form 3 coordinator).

### **Staff Development and Training (8)**

The participants viewed professional development in a broader context than inclusion: “but staff development is not just about inclusion” (Focus group 2, male English subject teacher). Another participant again mentions a broader context: “Different type of seminars on various topics that are related to the problems encountered in the classroom and teaching strategies, as well a, other seminars related to the formation of oneself with regards to spirituality” (Focus group 4, grade 1 class teacher).

Whilst participants of Focus Group 1 did not give much importance to professional development, they mentioned a talk given to them at school on inclusion, and mentioned the credits they took at university: “Once I did two credits way back at University in 1993” (Focus group1, math subject teacher). In Focus group 3 the participants had the general feeling that the school did not promote staff development. Whilst in Focus group 4 the picture was a very different one. One of the teaching teams mentioned the following: “In-service courses, meetings held during School development days, dedicated staff and administration, web research, the school consultant, and courses offered through the SLP department or other departments” (Focus group 1, grade 5 team).

One of the participants in Focus group 4 mentioned that professional development comes from the individual:

“Occasionally opportunities for development/further education are presented by the administration or outside organisations.

However, I feel that most of the time it has to come from the individual to take the initiative to better performance through acquiring knowledge, keeping up to date with new ideologies” (Grade 1 class LSA).

### **Reflective practice.**

Evaluating one’s own practice was seen as an important part of professional development for two of the participants, being in the same teaching team demonstrated further their professional attitude to their practice: “We discuss the previous week and boys’ needs during our weekly meeting; we try our best to make sure all the boys in class are being given due attention” (Focus group 4, grade 6 English subject teacher). Her colleague elaborates further, demonstrating their collaborative teamwork: “We evaluate the previous week and also the adaptations that were given during the previous week. We see what worked and what didn’t and try to improve on that” (Grade 6 English subject LSA).

### **Interaction of Disabled Students with Peers**

Enabling all students the freedom to play, and more importantly to play together, a benefit to the entire school community. Therefore, if any student is prevented from playing with his peers this diminishes the play experience of all. The social barrier of playground isolation is a very real concern of parents of disabled students, school staff and, I am sure, of both disabled students and non-disabled students themselves. It is important for disabled students to succeed socially, and one way to determine a school’s practice towards inclusive education is to see whether disabled students are accepted or rejected in the social scene during break.



Having a recognised role within the school gave me access to the playgrounds, which assisted me in my researchers role; similarly, so did the fact that I am familiar to all the disabled students who were observed, together with all the other students out in the grounds during break. I spent several breaks in the grounds as a break supervisor before carrying out the observations and after piloting the observational checklist as stated in the previous chapter. The boys had lost some interest into 'why' I was outside so often during breaks as I had become part of their natural daily break time environment. The playground observations were completed during break times, when the students were involved in free time activities. Three playground observations were carried out on each participant to try and gauge the disabled student's level of participation, social acceptance and rejection by peers. The disabled students were all observed in their own play area with their grade or form in the case of Participant 1. The school being evaluated has two break times and a variety of playground activities were observed, such as football, ball play, exchanging of trump cards, catch, frequenting the school tuck shop, and talking.

The observations revealed that the disabled students were seen to be involved in a range of different types of play according to their age and the different structures and supports that were in place. Play was in keeping with what their peer groups were doing during break time. All the disabled students observed were with their age groups. The disabled students initiated play and/or interaction with their peers in several ways: Going up to students and asking to play, having a ball of their own or trump cards seemed to be a way leading to playing with a group of peers. Greeting one another was another means of interaction that took place between the disabled students and their non-disabled peers. Social barriers sometimes existed because some of the disabled students spent more of the break time with LSA's and teachers out on supervision rather than with their peers. Teachers and LSA's were perhaps overly protective of disabled students, as was seen in the case of participant 4. The organisational issue of balancing risk with maintaining strict one to one supervision was a reality, and restricted

the participant's opportunities. Similarly, participant No. 4 was allowed to eat his lunch outside rather than eating it in class with his class and teaching team. This break of routine could be noted as an exclusionary practice, and also facilitated inappropriate behaviour and dependency on adults.

A positive finding was the many opportunities for role modelling and peer interaction that were observed and that occurred for all 5 participants, albeit on different levels.

Table 26  
Playground observations

Playground-Based Observations			
	Type & length of Interaction	The Person/ persons Involved in the Interaction	The Quality of the Interaction
Participant 1 A Form 3 student with Down syndrome. His entitlement is 1to1 support LSA was present in the ground but standing a good distance supervising the area with a group of teachers and LSAs	Initiated playing a ball game by going up to a group of students and showing them his tennis ball. The group started to play throwing the ball to one another, calling out each other's name as they threw the ball to the named student. Interaction lasted for 10 minutes	Form peers but not from his class	There was opening and closing of 5 communication circles with different students in the group. Participant on holding up his tennis ball was asked by the group who were chatting together 'do you want to play'? When distance became an issue for participant 1, he successfully got his ball by catching it and simply walked off without a word. His peers accepted his reaction and formed their group again.
Participant 1 Observation No. 2 LSA in the ground – but not next to participant 1	Initiated interactions by appropriate greetings with random students and teaching staff from the three upper Forms. Whilst walking around the ground. (Did not have his ball with him).	Students in the area from Forms 1,2 and 3	Appropriate exchange of greetings. Interactions were short and each one was just a Hi and a Bye. Participant was not addressed further and kept walking on. He greeted each group of students he came across and they responded with a smile and an exchange of greetings
Participant 1 Observation No. 3 In the Tuck Shop	Talking to students waiting in line to be served. He was talking about what he was going to buy by answering questions using two to three word phrases, or answering 'yes' or 'no'. Participant did not initiate conversation	Older Students Form 4 and 5 Adults on Supervision Duty	Closed communication circles by answering questions. Participant was assertive by answering an LAS who questioned him about the amount of packets he brought by answering 'it is my money'. Participant was reported by a student from his class.

Playground-Based Observations			
	Type & length of Interaction	The Person/ persons Involved in the Interaction	The Quality of the Interaction
Participant 2 Grade 6 Student with the label of autism. He is an identical twin to participant 3. Has the entitlement of shared support in the same class	He was in the Grade 5 and 6 area. Supervision was the supervision of the day. He was with a group of students who all have football stickers that they discussed and exchanged. The participant does not have any stickers but joined in with the conversation. Interaction lasted for 15 minutes	6 Grade 6 students	Interaction was reciprocal during the whole time. The participant dialogued with his peers in a playful manner. He was involved with the group, and although he did not have the same playing materials he remained interested and added to the discussion by mentioning the cards he still needed to collect. Interaction came to an end when the bell rang to signal it was time to line up. The participant led the group to the line up.
Participant 2 Observation No. 2	Grade 5 and 6 area playing football with a mixed group of Grade 6 students – Supervision was general as above – played for 10 minutes	10 Grade 6 students	Gave direct instructions to his peers during the game. Called out names with no direct connection to what was going on in the game. No comment by the other students. They continued playing football. The participant walked away from the game and left the area to get a drink of water.
Participant 2 Observation No. 3	Grade 5 and 6 area. playing catch with a group of 7 peers from his class. Played game for 5 minutes, ran around when called back and returned to the game	7 students from his class	Ran off when he was caught, When it was his turn to catch he ran around the group without direction. Different students in the group tried to intervene to guide the participant to catch them. Demonstrated he understood them and came back to play-did not follow the rules of the game

Playground-Based Observations			
	Type & length of Interaction	The Person /persons Involved in the Interaction	The Quality of the Interaction
Participant 3 Grade 6 Student with the label of Autism Identical twin to Participant 2's Entitlement is Shared Support in class.	Grade 5 and 6 area playing with a group of friends for 15 minutes. Supervision was the supervision of the day	4 students from his class	Interacts well and joins in the fun. Exchanges trump cards. Chooses his friends and initiated interaction by asking students to play with him.
Participant 3 Observation No. 2	Grade 5 and 6 area played for 15 minutes. Supervision of the day	A group of 10 students from both of the same Grades	Appropriate communication with his friends. He went up to two students and asked to play; they accepted. Together they organised a game of Cops and Robbers. They asked others to join in. Two of the group explained the rules to the participant and were his buddies throughout the game.
Participant 3 Observation No. 3	Grade 5 and 5 area playing in a group for 20 minutes Supervision of the day.	Group of 4 students	Students came up to the participant and asked him to play 'Sausage'. He accepted but did not know the rules. Protested when he was told off for not playing properly by one of his peers. He informed the group that they had not explained the rules well enough. One of the students from the group teamed up with him and they played as a team.

Playground-Based Observations			
	Type & length of Interaction	The Person /persons Involved in the Interaction	The Quality of the Interaction
Participant 4 Grade 4 Student with epilepsy, limited verbal communication, motor and coordination difficulties and has been given a general label of Global Developmental Delay. Entitlement 1 to 1 support	Grade 4 Area with a LSA following his every move. He remained beside the LSA supervising him. One interaction was for 10 minutes with a particular student.	Sitting down beside the LSA. 8 students approached the participant. One student spent 10 minutes chatting with the participant.	Inappropriate interactions when other students came up to him, he hugged and kissed them when they turned away and slapped them on their backs. This was a repeated behaviour with all but one of his peers (8 students had approached him). This peer sat down beside the participant and spoke to him about his family, football, television programmes and food.
Participant 4 Observation 2	Grade 4 Area Alone except for LSA, Interaction was in response to being given instructions, disciplinary and attention seeking.	Accompanied to the area by an LSA. Sitting down eating his lunch (which should have been eaten in class).	Started to eat his crisps; was instructed to eat his sandwiches first. Crisps were taken from him. Participant did not say a word and started to eat his sandwiches, but he immediately dropped a sandwich and started to laugh. He squashed another sandwich against the LSA clothes. Participant was reminded that his behaviour was not good and he needed to eat his sandwiches in a smart manner before he could eat his crisps. He immediately started eating very fast. Sandwich eaten and participant asked for his packet by saying 'Packet', was given the packet of crisps and he ate a couple of crisps, and then he touched the LSAs clothing with his hands full of crisps and laughed. Was told by the LSA that the crisps would have to be taken away if he did not eat them properly; he started laughing and continued to eat the crisps. Ate quietly for a few minutes but then hit the LSA with the packet. Crisps were taken away, the bell rang and participant immediately stood up and ran to line up.

Playground-Based Observations			
	Type & length of Interaction	The Person /persons Involved in the Interaction	The Quality of the Interaction
Participant 4 Observation 3	In Grade 4 area interaction with two peers and LSA Interaction with friend 10mins	Sitting down looking at picture cards with another student. Approached by a second student. Went to LSA for help	Reciprocal interaction between participant and friend. Pointing and naming pictures, participant listened to friend and responded appropriately. Another student came up to participant shouting his name; participant stood up and walked towards LSA, leaving his medication pocket behind him, Asked LSA to come to where he was sitting and the student who was shouting at participant came up to them and participant looked at LSA and started to kick the other student. LSA told participant it was wrong to kick someone, she sat on the step; participant took his medication, went and sat next to LSA. She asked participant what was wrong. Participant pointed at the student who had shouted at him. This student came up again and said in a teasing manner that he was going to buy pizza (participant's favourite food) Participant ignored and resumed looking at the picture cards with his friend.

Playground-Based Observations			
	Type & length of Interaction	The Person /persons Involved in the Interaction	The Quality of the Interaction
Participant 5 Grade 2 is a student with Down syndrome. His entitlement is for one to one support (30 minutes).	In the yard with own class. Interactions last for 5 minutes at a time.	Followed peers and played with one student and a small group of four students – play was structured by the teaching team.	Followed warm up exercises by imitating the student beside him, initiating interaction by joking and teasing. Whilst waiting for his turn participant initiated conversation with the peers in front of him and behind him. He began to jump onto the boy in front and was corrected by the boy. Continued and was given a 2 minutes time out by the teacher. Returned to the group and had his turn.
Participant 5 Observation 2 (30 minutes)	In the Discovery room with 13 peers from his class.	Playing in groups of 4 with pairs moving from one play station to another. Play was structured and the groups were assisted by an adult from their teaching team.	Attention seeking behaviour was observed, Participant kept mixing up numbers to try to confuse the teacher. He was laughing and the others in the group found this funny. The students were then put in pairs and participant took turns and interacted appropriately without direct adult supervision. The participant was chosen by several peers to be in their group. Participant initiated the interactions. Peers communication with participant was mainly of an instructional nature. During these activities students participated equally and in a fair manner.
Participant 5 Observation 3 (40 minutes).	Literacy Room  Interactions last for less than 5mins each.	Participant is with his class rehearsing for Holy Communion.  Interactions are spontaneous.	Participant discusses with peers actions to carry out during songs. He demonstrated the actions and was explaining when the actions should be done. Participant followed all instructions given as whole class instructions. Participant looks at a peer while singing to check he was doing the right actions. Participant got up when they had to repeat the songs for a third time, and began to run around the room. He was called by several of his peers to come and sit down next to them. This worked; he sat down and joined in again.

## Documentation

I used the following sources of evidence to corroborate my findings. Write-ups of a fifty hours practicum at the school by undergraduate third year psychology students who kept a logbook and a critique of what had been observed together with an evaluation of MAPs sessions by various team members. These



documents from 2009 and 2010 were used as data triangulation as they provide insight both from the major stakeholders and from outsiders to the school experience. These documents indicate and exemplified the practical day in day out implementation of inclusive practices within the school, without glossing over the difficulties and sometimes the worrying anti-inclusionary voice. On the part of evaluation, the documentation emphasized the development of the shared experiences of the participants in putting into practice a whole school policy on inclusive education, whilst demonstrating school achievements and improvements together with the challenges of including disabled students within the school system promoting participation, equality and community for all students. The analysis in Tables 27 and 28 below demonstrate the key features of the contexts and concepts, inclusionary practices, action in the school, and the management of systematic change, and validates the strengths and the philosophy of the practices of this school. In an important sense across all participants, the themes focused on teachers' resources, teaching teams, planning individualized learning, support teams, parent involvement and working in partnership with parents in order to provide a quality education for disabled and non-disabled students alike. The negative inclusive practices experienced by some of the participants were less positive teacher attitudes, labelling of students, class control, support from the administration for the teaching teams. and the amount of work involved.

**Table 27**  
**Positive and negative inclusive practices**

<b>Report No.</b>	<b>Positive Inclusive Practices</b>	<b>Report No.</b>	<b>Negative Inclusive Practices</b>
1, 3, 5	All students are given the opportunity to be responsible for their own self and make their own decisions	1, 4	A lot of work
1, 3, 4, 5	The school instils different values, principles and responsibilities in all students		
1, 2, 3, 5	Non-disabled students include disabled students in their own space and time		
1, 2, 3, 5	Allows for different ways of learning		
1, 5, 6	All students play and take part in the games		
1, 3	Individual support out of class		
1, 4, 5, 6	Ongoing assessment throughout the scholastic year		
1, 2, 3, 5	Universal Design		

Report No.	Positive Inclusive Practices
1, 2, 3	Transition programme for all students from the new intake to Form 1
1, 2, 3, 4	Mixed ability classes
1, 2, 3, 6	Communication between parents and staff
1, 2, 3	Teachers agree with inclusive education and are informed
1, 2, 3, 5	Participative learning
1, 2, 3, 5	Individual needs met in class through the diverse and accommodating curriculum
2, 5, 6	Students have learnt how to accept everyone in their class and help anyone in need
2, 5, 6	Stimulating, rich learning environment aimed at all students reaching their full potential
2, 5	High expectations for all students
2, 5, 6	Equity in learning opportunities
2, 3, 5, 6	Teamwork
3, 5, 6	Warm welcoming and caring atmosphere
3, 5, 6	Positive and rich interactions between the students
3, 5	Synchronised relationships between LSA and Disabled student
3, 5, 6	Positive effect on non-disabled peers
3, 5	Holistic view of students
3, 5	Student centred planning
4	Reduced labelling effect
4, 5	Sense of community
6	A positive take on challenges

Report No.	Negative Inclusive Practices
	Movement in class
	Class control
	Difficult to cope with certain impairments
	Set apart from the class (4)
	Support for teachers & LSAs
	Number of students in class
	Exclusion from class
	Class teacher's attitude
	Labelling

Table 28

Positive and negative evaluation of MAPs sessions

<b>Evaluation Report Number</b>	<b>Positive Evaluation On the way MAPs sessions are carried out</b>	<b>Evaluation Report Number</b>	<b>Negative Evaluation On the way MAPs sessions are carried out</b>
1, 2, 27,	Punctual		
1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 14, 17, 18, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 67, 69, 73, 74, 79, 84, 86, 88, 90,	Informative	2, 28,	Outside professionals
3, 9, 17, 23, 24, 28, 29, 31, 33, 36, 39, 43, 44, 45, 49, 53, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62, 66, 67, 69, 71, 73, 74, 76, 84, 87, 88, 89,	Individual educational planning	4, 46,	Parents' feedback
3, 7, 8, 33, 34, 50, 57, 60, 73, 79, 81, 82, 86, 87, 88,	Valuable meeting	4, 12, 15, 32, 38, 75, 80,	Mixed messages
4, 9, 11, 16, 17, 21, 27, 28, 29, 31, 33, 40, 43, 44, 47, 51, 57, 58, 62, 64, 66, 67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 81, 83, 89,	Facilitates planning	6, 12, 30,	Presence of parents
5, 12, 13, 17, 30, 33, 37, 38, 43, 60, 64, 65, 67, 69, 72, 74, 79, 83,	Positive Meeting	10,	Structure
6, 15, 19, 26, 78, 80, 82,	Constructive criticism	13, 2, 26,	Duration of MAPs meeting
10, 11, 17, 29, 35, 40, 41, 44, 46, 48, 53, 55, 62, 64, 65, 66, 70, 72, 81, 88, 89	Structured	14, 19,	Disabled student being present
12, 16, 18, 20, 23, 25, 30, 31, 35, 40, 42, 44, 49, 51, 55, 56, 58, 59, 61, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 70, 72, 74, 79, 81, 90	Teamwork	17,	MAPs meetings are restricted for disabled students
12, 16, 20, 29, 30, 49, 61,	Focused	20,	Parent disappointed with attitude of some LSAs
12, 23, 36, 42, 44, 45, 52, 57, 59, 61, 66, 83, 90	Parents expectations realised	22, 58, 59, 62, 78, 85, 86,	Timing of MAPs Meeting
14, 20, 48, 61,	Informal, friendly atmosphere	26, 58, 68, 82, 85,	Presence of all team members
14, 16, 23, 35, 36, 40, 51, 52, 55, 57, 58, 59, 68, 70, 71, 72, 83, 84, 90,	Parents have the opportunity to express concerns and expectations		
14, 17, 35, 40, 63, 70, 90,	Open communication		
21, 22, 24, 25, 29, 35 ,	Professional		
25, 56,	Support		
27, 28,	Presence of outside professionals		

## Conclusion

The work of including disabled students in an inclusive school relies on partnership premised on reflective problem solving and practices. This requires a multi-vocal discourse. Dialogue remains critical for the founding inclusive values of equality and freedom to exist in the permanent tension common to an inclusive school. Knowledge must be made explicit to be built upon or, if necessary, challenged. The findings of this qualitative part of the research provided an insight into the participants' own agendas, their mixed and varied attitudes, and inclusive and or not so inclusive practices. While all participants favoured inclusion, a great deal was taken for granted. The teaching teams and the Heads of School collective voices yielded much broader results than expected. Whereas I expected these participants to go into more detail with regard to disabled students and the provisions of support and the changes made through this educational journey, they wanted to share opinions and concerns that are much broader and central to inclusive education. Participants based these concerns and suggestions on their experience of inclusion. Teaching teams and administration's contribution reflected commitment and vocation to the profession of teaching. Furthermore, what they are proposing is more akin to universal design for learning and they gave importance to the interaction between educators and parents, but there was no consensus between the Junior and Secondary Heads and their teaching staff with regards to parents' participation within the school if it affected the day to day running and discipline of the school.

The main conclusions of the participants are that (a) inclusive education is a big challenge in the school's response to providing a student-centred pedagogy capable of meeting the needs of all the students in the classroom; (b) the practice of inclusive education needs to respond to the different ranges of learning styles of the students within the classroom - some form of differentiation is required if we want all the students to access the school curriculum; the method of teaching and the structure of the observations experience, such that theory and practice are experienced together, with an emphasis on teaching techniques; (c) there should be more collaboration with what is expected and the practice in the junior section of the school and the practices and expectations of the senior section of the

school; (d) teachers and LSAs were viewed by the Heads of Schools and through self-evaluation as professionals, and this was seen to be crucial by most of the participants and as a key to addressing the individual needs of all the students in the classroom, hence the need to be trained in order to be able to address inclusion and to be able to get used to work as a team is key to the inclusion of disabled students; (e) the use of technology in the classrooms; (f) conveying high expectations and providing intellectual challenge; (g) decision making for change has to be embedded in information, training and consultation with teachers; (h) establishing clear and effective discipline; (i) consideration for class size and revision of syllabi need to be entertained; (j) parent involvement is high when it comes to disabled students, but this is not always seen as an advantage and has not spilled over to the parents of non-disabled students - parental involvement needs to be strengthened; (k) change must be accompanied by discussion, shared responsibility, training, commitment to and conviction by both the junior and senior SMTs, teachers, LSAs, students and parents.

During the Focus Groups sessions I had expected the participants to go into more detail with regards to MAPs sessions and IEPs - the extras that are in place to ensure that disabled students receive their entitlements - but this was not the case. The questions that need answering are: is it because the staff are so confident with these procedures that they are just accepted as a part of their school routine, or have they become so complacent that it is just another thing they are expected to do?

In the following chapter the quantitative and qualitative findings will be compared and discussed.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion, Deliberation, Deduction**

*Come in, we celebrate difference here. You can be yourself and not struggle to fit in (Corbett & Slee, 2002, p.143).*

## **Responding to the Disability Challenge**

This chapter will discuss the research findings in conjunction with the presented literature review and will also address data triangulation issues. It provides a positive contribution to both the practice of inclusive education and inclusive educational research in the following areas:

1. A model of diversity versus a model of inclusion.
2. The presentation of an innovative approach to school management.
3. The possible changes brought about by valuing the education of disabled students.

### **1. A Model of Diversity vs a Model of Inclusion**

The readiness for the full participation of disabled students in mainstream schools varies within schools, from school to school, and across countries. Malta is no exception. Whilst the concept of inclusive education has generated much thought and has received wide attention at policy level, practices remain questionable and variable across the island (Tanti Burlò, 2010). Change concerning inclusive education seems to be complex. Within this particular case study a bigger picture has been developed in how to engage schools in educational changes around including disabled students in school. In the light of so many considerations, the research participants were representative of the school's population which participated through the use of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and student observations. The central purpose of this study was to try and understand this school's inclusive experiences, together with evaluating the design of equitable inclusive educational policy and practice, and how this translated in this school's everyday's inclusive educational experiences.

Reviewing the research question being: "What changes does the implementation of the Social Model of Disability that focuses on abilities and

skills rather than labelling and deficit have on a school population. This study was conducted *to examine the experience of a Maltese church school's inclusive educational experience and practice*. Due to the complex dimensions surrounding inclusive education, many issues were explored in connection with the inclusion of disabled students within the school. The case study approach made it possible to examine the complexities of inclusive education whilst allowing for the voices of the different participants to be heard, in particular, the views and voices of administrators, teachers, LSAs, parents and students. Sharing thoughts, opinions, experiences and concerns of all the main stakeholders can guide the inclusion process and inform decision makers about making schools more inclusive for all students. The methodological contribution of this study gives an opportunity to reflect on the research process. The findings of this study capture many from previous research studies in this area with regard to the practice of inclusive education at this school (Allen, 1995; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Exley, 2002, Mittler; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994, 2000).

The design of inclusive policies and a review of the school's culture, attitudes towards disabled students and the school's position towards excellence, equity, entitlement, and classroom practices were all part of the fabric that attempted to tell the story of this one school's unique educational ongoing journey. Indeed, to successfully include disabled students the school culture needs addressing. By simply providing the disabled students with the provision of an LSA and designing, writing and implementing IEPs to address the disabled students only creates a special school within a mainstream school resulting in the marginalization of disabled students from the wider school culture (Booth, 2002).

One has serious reservations on whether enough thought about the general educational system in Malta, designed and implemented in its present form, has taken place with a view to the educational inclusion of disabled students, and, if indeed it has, the adequate ability it has to cater for the learning of disabled students without any changes to structure, content and teaching strategies. However, this research confirms that reflective



thought regarding curriculum and its implementation is a priority for the administration. The school has risen to the challenge of being progressive, forward-looking, innovative and humane. This school demands and encourages change so that disabled students do not find themselves victims of an attempt of inclusion.

### **The benefits of social inclusion within the school environment.**

The social benefits of inclusive education was a major theme and interestingly came from the standpoint of fostering understanding, acceptance of diversity and the removing of labels. However, one may also note that social inclusion is an accepted ideology practiced amongst an increasing number of persons who are brought up in an inclusive environment. Therefore, accepting at face value the social benefits that one is told, stem from inclusion may not in fact be being realised in Maltese schools. Most of the participants recognised the acceptance of disabled students within the school. Social inclusion occurs when there is flexibility on the part of the persons involved. Although inclusive education and student diversity are popularized concepts in educational discourse, in spite of becoming popular terms these do not necessarily describe common knowledge and practice. The difference between theory and practice is notable both within this experience and within the literature (Azzopardi, 2005, Stivala, 2008). Through my own observations, I have been able to note how positive peer interactions do indeed facilitate the social inclusion of disabled students.

### **Inclusive Education for All and Equality**

Results from the quantitative and the qualitative analysis revealed that the majority of the participants in this study were in favour of this school's inclusive educational experience. The notions of human rights, education for

all and entitlement were strongly endorsed by participants as they stressed that inclusion is a right and exclusion a wrong. This is a further confirmation that the school implements the Salamanca definition of inclusion (UNESCO,1994) that stipulates that disabled children should attend their neighbourhood school, thereby placing schools and the people within them in a position to develop practices that reach out to disabled students (Ainscow, 1999). To be inclusive is to welcome and celebrate difference, and see it as a resource and not a problem. This is also a confirmation of the school's adoption of Sen and Nussbaum's (Terzi, 2008) capability approach which places equity and quality in education within the social justice framework. The capability approach as discussed in the literature review identifies education as one of the basic capabilities which provides a basis to expand further knowledge. Meeting the needs of disabled and non-disabled students, providing not only access but also quality whilst aiming at improving the learning outcomes for students in academic achievement, social skills and personal development, has redefined this school's culture.

This school's effort to be inclusive can be seen as both an individual and a collective challenge. Whilst there were strong feelings amongst the staff around values of respect for difference and a commitment to teaching all students, this was not felt or practiced by all members of staff. Contradictions and misconceptions were evidenced within the teaching staff and administration. Slee (2006) writes, "For, so long as 'regular educators' hold fast to notions of regular students and special needs students, inclusion is reduced to a chimera" (p. 158). The teaching teams perceived that the disabled students with an individual educational statement were in fact not the learners who created difficulties but those non-disabled students who labelled them as not fitting into the learning of their classroom. There was consensus by the staff that teaching in mixed ability classrooms and catering for diversity were both difficult and complex. Focus Group members report that both the size of the class and the wide range of abilities in the same class were seen to be challenges by the teaching teams and highlights the importance for effective educational approaches to inclusive education to be

employed in order to help all students' access learning. Responding to the specific question of this research, participants perceived the professional implementation of inclusive education, including teacher and LSA professional development, as critical to the successful educational journey for both disabled and non-disabled students alike. The data indicated that structure within inclusive schools needs to be systematic, extensive and elaborated upon, whilst at the same time remaining flexible. This was confirmed by the heads of school and by the focus group members. In the practice of inclusion the system adopts particular strategies, such as universal design for learning and cooperative learning, and provides support systems in order to develop the student's potential to its best (Martin et al.1993, Swain & Cook, 2001; Thomas. 1997; Zinkil & Gilbert, 2000). On reflection, teaching teams throughout the Junior School and most of subjects teaching teams in the senior school who responded positively to adopting inclusive practices and strategies reflect a classroom where disabled students are given a fair chance to learn. This gave parents of disabled children the confidence that their sons' needs were being met and, more than that, assured them that the school had high expectations and believed in their sons' abilities. Parents also reported that they felt they were well-informed, through the teaching teams, about how the school was supporting their sons.

However, inclusive educational research (Booth, Ainscow & Kingston, 2006) indicates that features of an inclusive school are meant to meet the needs of disabled and non-disabled students through appropriate school and teacher responses. These are inbuilt into formal, informal and non-formal educational practices, taking into consideration the school's ethos and the hidden curriculum where the values, rituals and routines of the school are acculturated within students and staff such that the disabled students is not left on the sidelines (Goodley, 2011). The problem is that the change needed is not being required of all schools in Malta and is not fully supported either by the Department of Education DQSE, 2010) or by the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT). Teaching staff may still see disabled students as

belonging somewhere else - other than the classroom, whilst thinking that the problem lies with the students, because of their labels are creating barriers to inclusive education. Alternatively, they fail to understand that the problem lies within the system that fails to demand that disabled students are treated with respect and dignity, and as equals within their schools. Slee (2006) suggests the importance questions of placements, resources and expertise notwithstanding, the real issues are 'who's in and who's out' because these issues relate to "questions of power and powerlessness" and the possibility of genuine educational reform" (p.118). This thinking lends itself to the social model of disability which acknowledges that educational difficulties are dependent upon the educational contexts in which the student is situated, and upon the type and quality of teaching that they receive (Mittler, 2000). Although the demands of the school are different from the functional relevance of the curriculum, and of the teaching and learning process, they are applicable to an inclusive school. Whilst the disabled student learns from his non- disabled peers, the process of concurrent learning of a disabled and a non-disabled student is reciprocal and mutually beneficial (Booth, Nes, and Stromstad, 2003, Shulmon, Lotan and Whitcomb 1998).

The presented participants' perceptions agree with the literature regarding the importance of a flexible curriculum in an inclusive school, together with the importance of curriculum adaptation and accommodations to suit the needs of disabled students, how the student is taught and and how he is assessed in the context of the class curriculum (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, and Jackson, 2002). Whilst the practice of Individual Education programmes, Person Centred Planning, Cooperative Learning, together with the practice of curriculum adaptation, are accepted as necessary practices for a positive inclusive school learning environment, one can move from the concept of inclusive education to the reality and its implementation. There are significant differences between perceived perception of inclusion, classroom practices and an actual knowledge and practice of accommodations, adaptations and authentic assessment. These findings agree with Calleja and Borg (2006) and Salend (2001) who claim that effective education

requires reflective educators that enable students by providing them with meaningful access and progress within the curriculum.

## **2. The presentation of an innovative approach to school management**

### **Inclusion: A Whole School Approach.**

Inclusion is a whole school approach (Frederick, 2005) and is concerned with challenging all forms of discrimination and exclusion (Armstrong & Barton, 1999; Slee, 2010). A whole school approach entails three inter-connected dimensions of a school, namely policies, culture and practices (Ainscow, 1999). The benefits of a whole school approach were evident in this research. For example, in the decisions taken about students' allocation, the planning procedures in place, the teaming up of LSAs and teachers to form teaching teams together with the matching of the students with the teaching teams are all practices which are central to a whole school approach. The school's decision to take part in this study was another example of this school's whole school approach towards inclusion where a 'whole school consensus' was gained. Inclusive education must be viewed as intrinsic to the mission statement of the school together with the philosophy, the values and practices of that school. The responsibility for the learning of all students should be a shared one. In a whole school approach to the inclusion of disabled students, every effort should be made to address all students' learning difficulties within the classroom. Evidence suggests that the school in the study implements a whole school approach, with the school management being closely involved in all innovations such as the creation of teaching teams and the adoption of the basic principles of a whole school approach, including participation and collaboration (Ainscow, 1991, Dyson and Millward, 2000).

This research shows that participants perceived that the school's practice for the provision of a holistic education for all students was realised. This was confirmed by the high percentage of the teachers who answered

positively to embracing the philosophy that each child was important and worth teaching and caring). The teachers also demonstrated their positive approach towards individual responsibilities both to disabled students and non-disabled students, working collaboratively and supporting one another. The majority of the teachers stated that they valued all children and their contributions to society.

The reasons for positive or negative attitudes towards including disabled students in mainstream schools continue to vary. Consequently, if inclusive classrooms are going to be effective they must provide learning environments where disabled and non-disabled students feel accepted and valued. These findings support the findings of Ainscow (1999) and Stainback and Stainback (1992) who hold that disabled students need to be included as equal and valued members of the classroom.

### **School Culture and Leadership for Including Disabled Students**

Research findings indicate that heads of school and teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the students may create the adequate culture within the school (Baker & Donnelly, 2001; Giangreco, et al., 1993). If the staff value the sharing of abilities of all students within the school, the students will in turn internalize this value. The school demonstrated ethical leadership and a commitment to teach all students together, irrespective of ability or challenges.

One of the key factors influencing inclusive educational practice is the Head of School's attitude towards inclusive education. This was evidenced in this study and in previous research findings. Dyson and Millward (2000) found that a common theme which is characteristic of an inclusive school is having a head who was committed to inclusive education. In this study, both heads of school held positive attitudes towards inclusive education, even if with some reservations. Praisner (2003) finds that heads of school with positive attitudes towards inclusive education are more likely to have

disabled students in inclusive classrooms. Whilst heads of school with negative attitudes towards inclusive education are more likely to place disabled students in segregated settings.

Aspects of these attitudes that emerged included: (1) attitudes that show accommodation, equality and a respect for human rights; (2) perception of impairments in various aspects of the classroom and school life; and (3) unfavourable attitudes towards disabled students existed but were only found in a few instances and were more of a reflection of the participant's perceived own inadequacies. On the whole participants' attitudes reflect a sense of fairness and equity for disabled students and non-disabled students alike. A human rights perspective is important to any discussion around the access and participation of disabled students in an inclusive school. Results in this study support that while the school supports the ideology of equal access to the curriculum and the importance it places upon each students learning, some secondary school teachers don't feel competent to address the disabled student's profile of abilities and needs. The results indicated the participants' awareness of individual differences together with the importance they gave to addressing individual educational needs. However, in practice they perceived the need for alternative provisions for some disabled students, which they were happy to leave in the hands of the subject LSA. The teachers answering the questionnaire demonstrated, by the high responses they gave to the variety of issues corresponding to the philosophy of inclusive education, that they believed in inclusive education. Whilst no two disabled students have exactly the same educational experience, entitlements and needs although attending the same school, lumping them together, albeit only in name, oversimplifies their educational experience and the schools' response to their personal learning journey. It seems plausible, from the data gathered in this study, to conclude that attitudes to including disabled students were similar to those found in research that surrounds political correctness both nationally and internationally (Azzopardi, 2005; Slee, 2005; Slee & Allan, 2001). School action is likely to shape and also be shaped by the models of disability and by perceived concepts of the

language and terminology used surrounding disability (Carrington & Elkins, 2005).

### **The Concept of a Caring School Culture**

In this research the caring culture of the school towards disabled students and non-disabled students alike was both observable and deeply embedded within the school. A caring school culture exists when all members of the school community demonstrate respect for others, kindness, fairness, and a sense of social responsibility in their behaviour and interactions with others. The heads of the school reported that the translation of the school ethos being put into practice was a very important factor towards creating a caring school climate. Corbett (1999b) reports that successful inclusion only occurs if the level of culture is examined and developed, which then gives meaning to the concept of inclusive education to the members of the school community. One of the heads of school confirmed this with her strong commitment to creating a caring environment. This was created by a number of strategies put into place by the school in response to including disabled students: an open door policy, transition programmes, peer support, buddy systems, and seeing students and their families as individuals (Mara Sapon-Shevin, 2007). This research identifies care with moving beyond the social model of disability and its limitations as argued by Shakespeare (1993). It recognized that, in the lives of disabled students, attending this school did not create any barriers, such as lack of accessibility, structural inequalities and discrimination. The concept of care is understood as a vehicle to help the school community as a whole, to understand the way in which student's with impairments become disabled. and to be supportive of one another in terms of interdependence.

Attitudes do not only have an effect on whether a teacher implements inclusive practices or not, but it also affects other important ingredients such as access, participation, language entitlement and control, all of which are



necessary for inclusive education to be successful (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). In this study teaching staff perceived themselves as both professional and committed to their own professional development. The heads of school promote professional development through teachers and LSAs attending in-service courses, staff development days, and through reflective practice and self-evaluation. These, however, are still only part of the hidden curriculum and are not yet formalized. Skidmore (2004) believes that the work culture of the school affects how teaching staff see their work, and indeed their students. This may indicate that while the heads of school were aware that knowledgeable and skilled teachers and LSAs are a necessary ingredient to the success of inclusive education, they were leading in a reactive way as opposed to a more proactive leadership style. As discussed by French and Swain (2004), inclusive education is part and parcel of the daily school routine and therefore it requires a whole school culture to change before a school can claim to have a culture of inclusion.

### **3. The possible changes brought about by valuing the education of disabled students**

#### **Teaching Teams.**

This research indicates that staff are perceived, and perceive themselves, as being both experienced and knowledgeable in including disabled students. The teaching teams at the school are perceived to have access to a wide range of knowledge, strategies and networks to support disabled students and their families.

Closely associated with teacher knowledge and attitude were issues related to accountability and teacher responsibility. Teachers readily accepted disabled students in their classrooms and in principle are knowledgeable about their responsibilities towards the disabled student. The reality of the teaching teams experience indicated that teachers relied on the LSAs for support, classroom management and working individually with

disabled students when they needed additional individual support. One of the concerns reported in the literature regarding a disabled student's entitlement to the support of an LSA is the practice of the teacher handing over the responsibility for the disabled student's learning entirely to the LSA (Giangreco et al., 2001; Giangreco, 2005). Focus group members teaching in the secondary school claimed that they left the disabled students learning in the hands of the subject-LSAs, if and when the disabled students were not following class curriculum. Lorenz (1998) reports similar findings; as the disabled students progress through the school system, the less likely it is for teachers to assume responsibility for them and, instead, hand that responsibility over to the LSAs. In the school being researched, the subject LSAs' backgrounds would include a qualification in the particular subject together with the Diploma in Facilitating Education and, at times, even a degree. Although this may be thought of as following the medical model, where difficulties are seen to be residing within the disabled student and therefore the teacher does not see the necessity to adapt to the needs of the disabled student, the school took the decision to choose trained LSAs to address this concern and therefore follow the social model of disability thinking. The aim was to pursue a common quality of education for disabled students and non-disabled students through the building of structures and the provision of activities for the widest possible range of interests and human abilities (Wendell, 1996). This focus on classroom practice shows that inclusion is constructed differently according to school level, school subject in relation to disabled students, with concern for other students, and taking into consideration the teachers' and LSAs' education experience.

### **Teamwork, Shared Decision Making**

The results of this case study strongly suggest that shared decision making can impact the process of including disabled students within the school. Shared decision making is a style of leadership that promotes

ownership and empowerment. In practice, this means being part of a team that can make a difference to practice in inclusive education.

In the setting for this case study, the Head of Junior school actively encourages shared decision making and felt that it led the teachers and LSAs to improved inclusive practices. This was corroborated by the teaching teams. For example, whilst teachers indicated that there were additional responsibilities for them to teach disabled students in their classrooms, they felt the support they received from the creation of teaching teams, the LSAs being in their classrooms to assist with resources and instruction, was an effective way to reach all students. Teachers and LSAs meeting each other and meeting parents assists in determining the best possible situation for each individual disabled student at the school. The school holds internal meetings, and meetings with external people, to support disabled students and their families. Tanti Burlò (2010), following Sapon -Shevin (2007), believes that creating classroom community forms the foundation for a successful inclusive classroom. It was highlighted that a good working relationship between the class teacher and the LSA is important for the student, since it creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom. This implies that students feel safe and comfortable and, in their turn, will learn more and increase their potential.

A team approach was substantiated by the participants in the focus groups, by interviews and by the parents' comments in both the questionnaires and in their evaluation of MAPs and IEP meetings. One teacher felt the importance of knowing the parents so as to be able to work together in order to identify the everyday practical problems in the life of the disabled students. Listening to the parents helped increase the possibilities for the disabled students. Another teacher agreed that working in a team was very reassuring for parents, students and the teaching team. One of the assistant heads felt that the team meetings involved the team as a whole, and a parent felt that teamwork encouraged good communication and a better understanding between teachers, LSAs, parents and the child.

Graden and Bauer (1991) emphasize that inclusive education cannot be successful without collaboration, since inclusion is a necessary element for professionals working together with the aim of improving the education of all of the students in the school. Lack of time to collaborate with one another during school hours was indicated in comments both by teachers and LSAs during the senior school focus groups' meetings. This was corroborated by a Junior School teacher who also felt there was a lack of time to sit down and discuss with the team ways to enhance teaching methods to support the learning of all students especially in her class. The supporting data from this case study indicates that teaching teams felt positive regarding team work and demonstrated an understanding of the importance of collaboration and of communication to plan and teach effectively (Sapon-Shevin, 2007; Tanti Burlò, 2010); they also asked for more time for collaboration and sharing of ideas in order to support the inclusion and achievement of all students.

### **Cultural Identity of Disabled Students**

In this research it resulted that the school welcomes and supports the cultural identity of disabled students by being pro-active in recognizing the differences between all students and in providing for individual learning differences within the classroom. Establishing the support disabled students need and are entitled to without labelling and singling them out was considered by both heads of school as being important. A school's failure to recognize and anticipate the needs of disabled students may well lead to exclusionary practices. Adopting and translating the concept of the social model of disability (Oliver, 2004) for both philosophical and practical reasons, as discussed in chapter two, has been a means for this school to put ideas into practice. Oliver describes the use of models as "ways of translating ideas into practices" (p. 19) and further places the responsibility onto professionals and society to address challenges: "society and not people with impairments should be the target for professional intervention and practice" (p. 19). However, the social model of disability has been criticized for its simplistic

understanding and representation of the impact that impairments have on individuals, which impairments can be culturally defined by the very environments disabled students find themselves in (Goodley, 2011). The theme of reflective practice, whereby the heads of school, teachers and LSA reflect on their own practices and teaching techniques, came to the fore both in the interviews and in the focus groups. It was clearly felt that, when students were not learning, the school needed to change teaching strategies and learning environments accordingly.

### **Them and Us**

Disabled students and non-disabled students are often perceived as two populations, the 'us' and the 'them'. The idea of difference is associated with the medical model of disability, namely that the focus is on the student's impairments. Interestingly, in this research teachers reported that when differences were educationally, physically or behaviourally overt, disabled students were, paradoxically, more included. On the other hand, when the difficulties were more elusive, the inclusive experience was claimed by a senior school teacher as being more challenging. Teachers found it more difficult to make accommodations, and the non-disabled students were less accommodating towards disabled students. Teachers' answers to the questionnaires confirmed that a large majority of them appreciated and were open to student diversity. 85% of the teachers stated that they respected disabled students as individuals with differences, in the same way they respected all other students in their classroom. Responding to student diversity by encouraging the participation of all students using whole group instruction was also rated highly (80%). Furthermore, it resulted from the focus groups that the teaching teams in Junior School adapted the lessons to up to four different levels and allowed for different outputs from both the disabled and the non-disabled students. This fits in with Ainscow et al.'s (2004) and Mitchell's (2005) principal features of inclusion - to remove barriers from learning by providing the support and structures to ensure

participation and progress. Though globally acknowledged, the principles and practices of inclusive education are generally conceived as relatively new, and it appears not to be that simple to include them in the every day practices of the classroom. In fact, Emanuele et al., (2005) argue that it is indeed easier to formulate policies on inclusive education than to practise them. It might be that every school has to find its own way, and that there is as yet no example of a universally successful model of inclusive education upon which to draw.

Results from this study identified that the vast majority of the parents of disabled students and non-disabled students who answered the questionnaire (99%) perceived and agreed that the school valued their sons. Interestingly, the only parent who noted that the school did not value his son was a parent of a non-disabled student. The students' responses of their perception of whether they felt that they were respected varied considerably between the primary and senior school students; this was to be expected. Whereas only 3% of primary school students stated that they felt that they were never treated with respect by the school staff, a more disconcerting 17% of secondary school students felt they were not respected. Although this is not the majority of the student participants, it still is a matter of concern and needs to be taken seriously because when teachers who are in charge with caring for all students fail in their responsibilities to build a climate of respect towards each and every student, this could well have a detrimental effect on individual students and upon the inclusive practices of the school, due to the very fact that respect underpins inclusive education (Thomas, 1999; Wendall, 2008). Feelings of powerlessness may also come into play because teachers and LSAs hold positions of power and responsibility, and students may feel that there is nothing they can do to change the teachers' and or LSAs' perception of them. The parents' conclusions being positive, feeling that their sons were respected might be based on how the teachers spoke to them about their sons.

## **Differentiated Teaching**

The results confirm this school's claim to be practising an inclusive philosophy underpinned by the Social Model of Disability, where disabled students were not simply placed in a classroom but were participating in the learning of the class, especially in the Junior School and the lower forms of the senior school. This demanded a change in pedagogy. In such a scenario, class curricula were made accessible for disabled students, and the teaching teams have taken responsibility for both the disabled students' and the non-disabled students' pedagogy. Inclusion does not imply equality but equity. Each individual student is unique and has his particular needs which sometimes, due to a variety of circumstances, require support and attention. Good teachers identify the strengths of each student, since each student has something to offer to the classroom community (Giangreco & Doyle, 2000). Providing individualized instruction means that each and every student must be looked at as an individual when determining modifications and educational support. In this research all teachers allowed for accommodations and prepared curriculum adaptations with the support of the LSAs, or left the adaptations in the hands of the LSA. Appropriate curriculum and adaptations were considered important by the teaching teams and by parents, and were enforced by the assistant heads who were responsible for curriculum. All the participants in both interviews and focus groups were knowledgeable about the principles of the Universal Design for Learning and reported evidence of practice at the multiple means of representation stage.

Notwithstanding the fact that there are many different ways for students to participate in class and school activities, the student engagement is influenced by teachers' and LSAs' expectations, and has opened some concerns around the lived experience of disabled students' inclusion at the school. This seems to support the inclusion/exclusion debate where disabled students experience being excluded from participating and learning in schools, within the theoretical constructs underpinning this study, namely the Social Model of Disability and Universal Design for Learning. As noted in

the literature review, disabled students remain unrepresented in images of schooling and educational attainment (Goodley, 2006) whilst schools continue the practice of excluding disabled students by singling them out for individual support lessons with an LSA. Tanti Burlò (2010) proposes that the Maltese inclusive education system is often seen as the integration of disabled students and not as a philosophy of adopting universal design for learning to address all children. Alternatively, the experience of parents of disabled students covered by this study indicated that the school encourages the active participation of their disabled sons in all school and class activities. This was confirmed by both heads of school when they spoke about a whole school policy that addresses the learning and participation of all their students.

### **Person Centred Planning**

Individual education programmes need to reflect the disabled student's ambitions, learning style, motivation, and his needs and entitlement. All students need to be able to demonstrate mastery, not just exposure (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose & Jackson (2002). In this research this was recognised by the heads of school as being fundamental to the designing and implementation of the IEP. IEPs are meant to provide specific, measurable, attributable, realistic and time-bound goals for student achievement. Another supposed function of the IEP is to provide the guidelines and the means of measuring success of services and academic growth for disabled students in the classroom. The extent to which the staff in this research expected to adapt their practices to support the achievement of disabled students differed at a theoretical, conceptual, philosophical, technical and practical level. On the one hand, at the theoretical, philosophical and conceptual levels, teachers were all for it but they then found difficulty at the implementation stage. This ties in with the link between lack of teacher knowledge and exclusionary classroom practices which is well-evidenced in the literature – refer to the literature by sourcing and talking



about links to this. In this research IEPs were perceived in several different ways, including some misconceptions. The Head of Senior school viewed IEPs as a compromise between what the disabled student needed in order to access learning and reach his '100%', and what the school was able to offer. On the other hand, the Junior Head of School viewed IEPs as a way in which the entitlements of disabled students were met, but also so was IEPs as an exclusionary practice at times. During the focus groups, IEPs were only mentioned in Focus Group 4 and, interestingly, this was to confirm the planning that went on at the school for the disabled students. The use of individualized education plan (IEP) can encourage access to the curriculum and to the hidden curriculum. The importance of the IEP cannot be overemphasized as IEP's set out the disabled student's entitlement, and is a tool to evaluate the learning journey of the disabled student (Ainscow, 1999). The majority of parents of disabled students (94%) in this study attended their son's IEP, which places importance on the IEP as a school provision for disabled students. While accommodations matter for disabled students, learning is what counts. Finding the best way to make this a reality of the classroom is a challenge facing the teaching teams and administration (Ainscow, 1999; Turnbull, 2006).

MAPs sessions and IEP meetings provided both the school and the parents with various forms of rich information about disabled students, including information about achievement, social and physical skills with the aim to better include and support disabled students. Having a shared framework that outlines an educational plan that suits an individual student which all team members agree upon was felt important by all the majority of the participants in this study. These findings confirm the research by Giangreco et al. (1997) by bringing about a renewed focus on the beliefs, philosophies and practices of mainstream classrooms and their teachers and LSAs.

## **A Sense of Safety**

The school in this study can by and large be described as having a caring and supportive learning environment by the students. Feeling safe by knowing that if one had a difficulty it would be addressed, again got a more positive response from primary students. 76% of younger students stated that usually their difficulties were addressed compared with 50% of senior school students. However, 31% of the secondary school students, compared to 22% of the primary school, said that their difficulties were 'sometimes' addressed. Both the secondary and primary students' responses to receiving help from their teachers and LSAs were positive. In fact, 82% of the primary students and 67% of the secondary school students stated that they had received help when they asked for it from the teaching team. The social model of disability minimizes individual needs emphasizing the independence of the disabled student once the barriers had been removed. The tensions between independence and needing help has led to the exploration of interdependence moving beyond the social model of disability. Shakespear (2000 a, 2000 b) argued that the 'individualizing and excluding' language of dependency should be replaced by a recognition of the basic social condition of 'interdependence' and caring solidarity (2000a: 63-4). Interdependence explores ways in which we depend on one another through processes of reciprocity, and assumes that there is always a value in a relationship, no matter how one-sided it may look on first consideration (Rohrer, 2005). In this school, interdependence is promoted and valued by the participants and is one of the inclusive processes in which giving and taking care has become an unexceptional part of school life.

The teaching teams were created to assist all students and reduce the labelling effect on disabled students whilst increasing their autonomy without reducing their entitlement for support. This was confirmed by, the Head of the Junior School when she spoke about the teaching teams working together to be able to reach all the students in their classes. Through the planning of the teaching teams every student is ensured access to the

learning of the class, and therefore disabled students felt secure in the sense that they were participating members of the class community (Lyon and Lyon, 1980; Villa, 1996).

Parents on the whole felt safe with decisions taken by the school due to the planning processes that the school had implemented, such as MAPs sessions and IEP meetings. They felt confident that their sons' needs were being catered for, and that their sons were receiving the best possible education, academically, socially and behaviour wise. Another consideration was that parents felt confident to voice their opinions and put forward important suggestions.

### **Parental Involvement**

One recurring theme in the literature on inclusive education is the importance of parents' involvement in the education of their children (Mittler, 1993). Parents are the ones who know their children most; hence they can assist the school team in choosing the appropriate learning journey for their child. Parents have a central role to play, since all learning introduced by the school team has to be implemented in all daily activities. Giangreco (2000) believes that parents, students and professionals must rely on each other to share experiences in order to provide appropriate and comprehensive educational programmes. Parents' involvement and not participation implies an imbalance of power between parents and professionals and uses parents as facilitators of the procedures (Fulcher, 1999).

However, the partnership between parents and school requires preparation (Mittler 2000). The effective relationships between schools and parents is noted to be critical in the successful inclusive educational journey of disabled students and their families. The overall picture in this study was that the parents of the disabled students showed a great interest in their sons' schooling. Parents reported feeling listened to by the school. In fact, most parents (94.3%) felt that the school took their concerns seriously.

However, the school still struggled to include parents as partners, especially in the senior school. Specifically, the traditional model of parental involvement, which is teacher-led and gives parents a passive role, is still being practised in the senior school by the head of school and by some of the teachers and LSAs. The Head of Senior School feels that parents can be seen as being demanding and their suggestions, although listened to, would not be a part of the decision making process. Schools often view these parents as adversaries and tend to blame them for a student's learning and behaviour problems (Soodak, 1998). But in the Junior School the experience of parental involvement was quite different, and teaching teams together with administration had relationships with parents of disabled students that supported the inclusion and achievement of these students. In line with the arguments of Clough and Barton, Ignoring feedback from parents was a mistake, since they were the end-users of the educational process. Whilst parents might not have the background to comment on the content of the teaching, they do have the background to comment on the effectiveness of delivery and learning (Clough & Barton (1996).

### **Student Experience**

It is necessary to ensure that a positive climate is developed between disabled and non-disabled peers, and this is accomplished with whole school commitment to peer group interactions. Regarding the concept of disability as the focus of a social movement, Shakespeare (1993) argues towards the importance of the formation of a disabled students own identity therefore rejecting segregation and augmenting peer group socialisation.

Inclusive education encourages personal and social relationships, and attitudes based on a view that disability is part and parcel of human diversity. In a school that claims to include disabled students, it is important that the discourse does not exclude the students' perspectives and interpretations. Therefore, in order to understand if inclusive practices are successful and

meeting the students' needs, it becomes important to understand students' attitudes towards their experience of the practice of inclusion. Fundamental to the culture of inclusive education is engaging with students to seek their perspectives on the different facets of their inclusive educational experience. Every student in this study was given a voice through answering the questionnaires. Whilst the experience of the students who took part in the study was, on the whole, positive, there were some reservations regarding the practice of inclusion and the students' perception towards disabled students. When non-disabled students were asked to comment on whether they felt alike or very differentiated from disabled students, the positive comments ranged from mentoring, respect, same and different, the need for equal treatment, and inclusion. The negative comments were about academic, physical and intellectual superiority, misfortune and general depreciative comments towards any form of impairment. In answering what inclusion meant to them, the senior school students' negative comments were about disabilities, segregation, differences, special classes and labelling. Positive comments were about acceptance, inclusion in class, school and community of all students, encouragement, helping, and giving everybody a chance. Regarding the way inclusion in the school could be improved, senior students' comments were about being altruistic; for example, "Being kinder to each other"; advise to the school staff stressed that "Disabled students should always with us." This emphasized the fostering of care, belonging and community within the school, and the students' commitment to inclusive education.

The framework for understanding disability for most students appeared rooted in the social model of disability. The students demonstrated both knowing and having an understanding about impairments, and that the impact should not result in segregation. The students' response reflects the vital information that they have on their experience of inclusive education. They were of the view that effective inclusion education is comprised of established support systems that emanate from the collaboration of peers, teacher involvement, and being a part of the class. Therefore, the study's

attempts to ascertain the views and attitudes of disabled and non-disabled students about the inclusion of disabled students revealed that inclusion facilitated social relationships between disabled and non-disabled students.

### **Implications for Practice**

Whilst there is no one formula that can be applied for successful inclusive education, there are possibilities for inclusive education processes that support disabled students to access quality teaching and realize enhanced learning outcomes. As this school continues to examine a myriad of educational practices and support structures for disabled students, it is imperative that the views of all are heard if we want disabled students and non-disabled students to benefit from inclusive education. The inquiry revealed the perceptions of the participants surveyed, interviewed or observed. These perceptions show that while inclusionary practices are generally successful, there are still areas calling for improvement. This improvement includes smaller classes, the improvement on the conceptualisation of disability that designated the disabled as 'others' and, instead, to really mean to see the disabled student as part of the whole ensemble, more students' and parents' voices heard in the decision making process, and improved teacher practice towards inclusive teaching strategies through training. The traditional classroom delivery approach must continue to be challenged and re-examined in the light of increasing the disabled student's participation in class, supported by the implementation of universal design for learning in the classrooms throughout the school. Dewey (1916), the father of participatory education, argued that the educational process must begin with, and expand upon, the interests of the student. The participants in this research, namely, heads of school, teaching teams, parents and students, were in agreement that the strengths, learning styles and interests of disabled students, and, to a lesser degree, of non-disabled students, are taken into consideration by the teaching teams during class analysis, class work, group work, homework, school activities and outings.

Promoting success for all students within the unique attributes of an effective inclusionary classroom requires addressing the needs of students as well as the needs of teachers and LSAs. Developing teacher training programmes that address the challenge of collaboration and effective instruction, including the use of technologies that promote independent learning and access to the curriculum, should be flexible enough to ensure that disabled students who need more attention are given their entitlement to appropriate and effective instruction. Brighthouse (2000) argues that equity in inclusive education can never be conceived as the attainment of equal outcomes because, no matter what level of resources are provided, disabled students are unlikely to attain the same outcomes as non-disabled students. He suggests that we should focus on the degree of inequality.

### **Implications for School Improvement**

The philosophy, theory and practice of inclusive education lead to a discussion on what inclusive education is, what needs to happen for it to be successful, how its success is evaluated; this is to be had together with consideration of the differing views on its implementation. This leads to the need for school improvement. The focus on the wider definition of inclusive education is on the restructuring of schools and systems in order to increase the participation of disabled students. Inclusive education is all about students' needs being met in mainstream schools rather than the need to do away with impairments. It is about the way of doing things and the need for certain practices to be improved upon, and about new practices to be implemented in our schools. Schools are to make possible the development and practice of inclusive education. In collaboration, teachers and LSAs should take every student's needs into consideration, and select, plan and implement instructional strategies in such a way that they meet the needs of the student. Positive school climate, access and support largely hinge on the teaching teams' action system knowledge as they implement decisions that allow every student to access the school curriculum and benefit from

instruction. Deep systemic changes are required if inclusive education is going to be successful (Anisow, Booth et. al., 2006; Azzopardi, 2005).

In this school there is evidence that changes made have been innovative and aggressive. For example, staff are recruited purposefully; assessment procedures in the Junior School, and to a certain extent in the senior one, have changed to provide for both formative and summative assessment procedures; teaching teams have been established throughout the school to welcome, teach and support all students; inclusion is planned for and support structures are in place within a whole school policy.

### **A critique of the methods used in this study**

#### **Methodology.**

The methodology used had a number of limitations, and these will be outlined below along with any wider implications. Case study research allowed investigation to occur by employing mixed method research in this one school.

The findings of the case study should be interpreted in the light of the following limitations. This case study was limited in the scope of coverage by the sample chosen. The participants selected were from one boys' church school. However, the purpose of this study is not pure generalizability of findings but to use the findings to explore and learn in other settings '... sufficiently close to its underlying structure to enable others to see potential similarities with other situations' (Winter, 2000; p.1).

While I have indicated only plausible interpretations of the data in this study, there may be other explanations for the data that may be more accurate due to the limitations as stated. Besides, with inclusion being a process (Anisow, Farrell and Tweddle, 2000), the major stakeholders' perceptions and experiences may lead to a different experience in the future. This research was participatory to a point and, although as the researcher I



did not share the same experiences as the disabled students and their parents (Oliver, 1992; Shakespeare, 1993), I felt we all shared common ground. I was someone who knew something about some aspects of disability but, even though I did not personally experience disability as a parent, I experienced it as a sibling. Our relationships throughout the research process, was not viewed as researcher-participants where the researcher was the expert and was in control of the participants. Rather, we saw each other as colleagues, sharing skills and perspectives on issues of interest and concern to all of us. I viewed myself as a researcher working in partnership on many levels with multiple reciprocal gains. This approach, although it did not fulfil all the criteria of participatory research, has gone some way to redressing past imbalances where the researcher as expert has contributed to the oppression of disabled students and their parents (Barton, 1995).

### **Validity and reliability.**

Less clear-cut in case study research are validity and reliability. Gillham (2000), in his view of case studies, views them as an interesting story, one that is valid in that it is the discourse of the teller, and reliable in that it occurred at that particular point in time. The analysis of the data was as rigorous as I could make it, with my own interpretations of the data being as clear for inspection as stipulated in the rules of rigorous research, both as a participant in the study and as a researcher. My influence in the study both as a researcher and as someone bound up in the processes as the teaching support consultant to the school and my role as a professional in the field of inclusiveness, supporting disabled people and their families in their communities in Malta, cannot be understated.

The results were valid in that they were checked with several sources, and reliable in that they were duplicated across them. The discussions above are my interpretations, with rigour built in, to counteract any possible

bias on my part as being imbued with a commitment to inclusion. I was also very alert not to over represent participant views that were close to my own. Samples of transcripts of all the data used are in the appendices (Appendices M, N & O) so that others can view them and make their own interpretations should they wish. Taking on a more positive approach through the administration of questionnaires and taking on an assumption of an objective reality, balanced out the influence that I might have had as the researcher (Robinson 2002). Therefore, employing mixed methods within a single case study, and the very fact that the data came from different sources, from different stakeholders and in different formats, being representative of all the different players and their various positions within the school, added to both the reliability and the validity of the study.

### **Study Contribution**

The above discussion concentrated on the implications of the research for both theory and practice. This study contributes to the knowledge of included disabled students in a mainstream school by showing how going beyond the social model of disability has shaped the types of practice offered in one school in Malta and how this practice has already influenced educational policy in Malta. The social model of disability in Malta has instigated change and influenced the policy surrounding inclusive education.

This study is underpinned by the social model of disability and also looks beyond the social model as practiced in Malta, by suggesting that changes need to be about school improvement and about policies that relate to inclusive education instead of about special education disguised under the label of inclusive educational policies. Many disabled students feel that research has cast them in the role of objects being researched, and they are not considered equal participants of the research (Allen, 1999). The task before us is to take up the challenge proposed by Goodley (2001) "The aim now is to move from the social model of disability to mutually inclusive social

theories of disability and impairment that are open to and inclusive to people who have ‘learning difficulties’” (p. 225).

In this study both disabled students and their parents were considered as ‘experts’. Oliver (1992) argues that both disabled and the non-disabled have a part to play in the eradication of oppression of the disabled. This study has increased the disabled students’ voice and that of their parents and enabled them to enter the arena of liberation of the disabled (Oliver, 1992). Findings from the study indicate that whilst there are more than beginnings of collective belonging, and more needs to be addressed further, both respect and equality are being promoted. Equity has been addressed and there are not two systems of education within this school: both heads of school were adamant about having a whole school policy that addresses the needs of all students. Barriers to learning in this school are identified for all students during class analysis, and are addressed through the different support levels that are in place. This equates disability with diversity and recognises that the regular classroom is the place where diversity must be addressed.

### **The Bigger Picture**

Despite the growing enthusiasm for inclusive education in Malta, exclusionary practices towards disabled students are still found and practised. If research becomes routed in the ‘whys’ and ‘why nots’ of what is not being practised and realised, then schools that are practising inclusion, sometimes in spite of all odds, will be left on the sidelines of educational research rather than becoming a showcase of good practice. The heart of the experience this case study set out to present was the practice of one school’s experience of including disabled students. Learning more about the inclusive cultures and practices at this school was both instructive and provided examples of what can and, indeed, is working, and which practices need to be strengthened or eliminated. The main results of the experience

were positive. The relevance of this message is that a school where diverse learners are receiving a quality education in an inclusive environment is not only desirable but also possible. The supporting data from this case study indicate that, while the teaching teams feel positive about their practice regarding shared decision making, they want more time for collaboration and sharing of ideas. Finding time for regular meetings between the teaching teams becomes the responsibility of the heads of school. Although this is challenging, the indications are that this would be a worthwhile endeavour that would indeed increase opportunities for shared decision making, provide time to work as a team and, most importantly contribute to ownership, which would help to resolve barriers to including the disabled students in the learning process of the classroom and improve practices within the school.

On the basis of this school's experience, it is clearly evident that the usefulness of starting any understanding of inclusion by working with the stakeholders for individual schools and examining closely their experience of inclusions are rooted in the context of their particular and changing circumstances. Inclusion is seen as both complex and variable. To some inclusion means all students belonging in class. To others it means some disabled students receiving a different approach. Sometimes it is held up as an ideal and at other times it is construed as detrimental to a disabled student who might best be excluded from the mainstream classroom and be educated in small groups or individually by an LSA (Giangreco, 2001).

Several critical issues emerge from this study as an opportunity to refocus efforts in inclusive schooling and to build upon effective practices.

This research has uncovered nine issues that seem to be compelling: (1) policy implementation and practice; (2) teaching teams; (3) collaboration; (4) parents', teachers', and student's views and voices, (5) accountability; (6) academic access; (7) participation; (8) social access; and (9) individual in-class support. For participation to be meaningful, leading to positive learning outcome, factors such as a school culture that values diversity, a safe and supportive environment, and positive attitudes are essential components of

participation. This study's findings further support these factors.

In this school, at secondary level the challenges to including disabled students were present and may be attributed to educational accountability, less positive teacher attitudes, and increase in academic subjects, and an increasing achievement gap between disabled students and non-disabled students. There is a need to innovate secondary education by providing flexible models of instruction, creating pathways where students can easily step into school - out of school without feeling a failure by introducing vocational subjects.

The key message of the experience is that today we are still struggling to see the reality of inclusive education and to come to terms with the measures that need to be taken on the levels of policy, culture, practice and finance. Further investigation of these topics will improve theory, research, and practice for instruction which will benefit all students. There is a need to see schools not from the 'centre' of the schools but from a standpoint that may give us a broader and deeper viewpoint. Patchwork is mediocrity, and the provision of support in place today, that of placing LSAs in charge of disabled students, amounts to patchwork. This research has strongly indicated that an inclusive approach to support is more effective, and support often works best when it is directed to the classroom rather than targeted at an individual (Lacy, 2001). The very presence of LSAs prevents teachers from considering their own role in adapting the curriculum to ensure their students' access and participation (Lorenz, 1999; Tennant, 2001). Several studies conclude that the presence of LSAs prevents disabled students from interacting with their peers (Giangreco et al., 1999). Radically changed situations demand radical solutions. Whilst schools continue to ignore the social realities of today's students by assuming that all students are motivated, and ignore the social reality that not all students are motivated and want to learn, they are failing as institutions that have to ensure that disabled students are given an appropriate education; this is unacceptable.

Examining this one schools' experience it becomes clear that inclusion

is a microcosm of education reform, and therefore education reform is needed, wanted and inevitable if we are going to really take inclusive education seriously basing it on the principles of human rights, social justice and economic development, in that order, and not focusing mainly on the latter. Whilst inclusive educational policy in Malta has provided parents, disabled students and schools committed to including disabled students with the necessary conditions to challenge exclusion, the real experience demonstrates that policies do not necessarily translate into action. To ensure that students in every classroom in every school in Malta achieve the ideal that every student can reach his 100% capability, educators need to translate research and policy information into implementable educational practices. The questions being asked by this school is: 'how can we do it better?' as opposed to 'should we do it?'

As I have been immersed in this study together with the literature that surrounds inclusive education, and as we are all changed by our experiences, so have I been changed too. Whilst I was searching for evidence of sound inclusive practice during this systematic review of one school, I now find myself asking what indeed makes a difference to the disabled and non-disabled students' inclusive educational experience. Is it values, attitudes, disability awareness, language, professional development of teachers and LSAs, expectations, or does it centre on tolerance and respect? In many ways, this is the whole picture of a school's journey towards equity in education. The positive views that these results suggest may be attributed to the increasing awareness of disabled students among the respondents and the actual "doing" of inclusion. This study suggests that the difficulties faced by all involved are clear, and there are many challenges ahead before Malta can really be considered to possess a good working model for inclusive education. Although inclusion has progressed, there still lie difficulties between the use of the medical and social model in practice and in the provision for entitlement and support. One of the major difficulties is getting schools and teachers to become catalysts for effective teaching where disabled and non-disabled students can learn together

supported by appropriate learning programmes and provided with sound educational opportunities.

### **Afterthought**

My motivation for working the field of inclusive education has been, from the outset, one of an activist. Inclusive education lent a human rights support base to the fight against exclusion of disabled students from mainstream schools. As my engagement within this field grew, I became more aware of the extraordinary resistance to inclusive education as a practice and of the segregation of disabled students within schools that are supposed to practice inclusive education. My initial response was to look at the social model of disability as a paradigm shift that would underpin the changes needed in the existing support structures that replicated the special school but within a mainstream one. I was enthusiastic about the social model of disability but, as I developed my practice and redefined my thinking during this research journey, I felt the need for inclusive practices to move beyond the social model of disability, because just by placing a disabled student into a mainstream school does not alter his impairments and the impact they may have upon his learning and accessing the curriculum. Supports are a very much needed, and in reality need to be individualized. Any denial that impairments are unproblematic required me to rethink this positioning. Learning support, the role of LSAs and learners' support need to be viewed as entitlements and as a means of enabling disabled students to participate by overcoming potential barriers to learning and participation in class and within the school. Disabled students and their right to a good education, along with the environmental factors, are both equally important and one does not operate without the other. If disabled students are socially included but their learning is left in the hands of an LSA, or a team of LSAs, then this practice is exclusionary and infringes the disabled students' rights (Lindsay, 2003). Disability as within this school has become a strand of diversity and is dealt with as part of the daily running of the school. An ethics

of care which the school in this study has demonstrated it does encompass, and indeed recognizes multiple ways of contributing to the classroom community, has opened the school's potential to recognize and actively encourage positive contributions by disabled students.

In conclusion, on looking back at this one school and, more importantly, at all the people involved in this journey, this can be considered as an example of an agent of change. This school has altered the practice of support for disabled students across the island. This study introduces the struggle for inclusive education from different perspectives in order to draw a holistic picture of this school's current situation as a platform for further development within the practice of inclusive education.

Within the whole school model, this school really has tried to reduce labelling of disabled students as being seen as 'other', as being seen as 'different', and therefore requiring a different educational journey. The current study can be viewed as one case study set in a small area of the global response to inclusive education. The values embodied in the New National Minimum Curriculum Framework of equity in education can come to fruition by ensuring that all learners, with and without disabilities, pursue their learning potential to the fullest.

Finally, this research was a courageous journey in which beliefs were challenged, making sense of an array of complexities, and uncovering conflicts and tensions within this one school. Through this journey the importance of understanding culture and policy whilst concentrating on practice has developed my personal research skill, which will underpin further research in the field of inclusive education.

### **For Further Consideration**

Points to consider for creating a model of inclusive education: a whole school model but not just for disabled students as recognized through



statementing of disabled students but for all students, that goes beyond the social model associated with ways to equalize social entitlements through concessions. Is the social model, with its IEP, adapted or differentiated work, creating a new elite, where parents perceive academic advantages to having their son statemented? Where does one draw a line between a statemented student and one who is not statemented but struggling? Should a line be drawn? For example, reduced homework gives a better quality of life to a student with a statement, enabling him to participate in extra activities. A model of diversity would provide that to whoever needs that concession; but then, who decides? The question: How can a board, outside the school, take this responsibility? The very process of statementing creates emphasis on difference and not on diversity. Universal Design, including peer supports, buddy systems, the use of technology for **all** the students as a whole class catering for the diversity by presenting diverse modes of accessing and assessing knowledge and learning that has taken place.

## **Recommendations**

1. A radical change in perception, which is still one of 'pity' when trying to redress the balance through concessions, even though we call them rights. The notion of 'needs' ought to be readdressed as 'entitlements'. Disabled students are entitled to receive, with their peer group, a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum delivered by the class and/or subject teacher supported by the LSA. The school should recognize and mobilize the appropriate support, advice from parents and students, and resources necessary to achieve the disabled student's entitlement. The diversity of all the school members needs to be recognized and valued. Schools should recognize that individuals are unique in their interests, abilities, motivation and learning needs.
2. To focus more on identity formation of **all** the students, since the

present system is still placing the statemented boy in a “figured world” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998) whose artifacts are statements of need, an IEP, an LSA, adapted, differentiated or alternative assessments, which also involves teacher and LSA identity here as successful, fulfilled or frustrated, and come to terms with the measures that need to be taken on the levels of policy, culture, practice and finance.

**Policy** – established policy of teaching teams and code of practice based upon positive attitudes to inclusive education to ensure that we are not speaking about practicing a social model of disability but, in fact, are still operating from a deficit model of disability (Ainscow, Farrell and Tweddle (2000). When we are still referring to students as having “special needs”, or to the student “with the LSA”, or to the student with a “statement of special needs”, and are not allowing disabled students to attend school because they have the “statement of needs” for one-to-one support when the LSA is sick or on special leave or when the rest of the schools have examinations. This also demonstrates that inclusive education is still for ‘some’ rather than for ‘all’, and policy needs to address the above as exclusionary practices.

**Culture** – move away from a hierarchal mode of authority into the business model of horizontality (team responsibility) to improve equality for and tackle discrimination against disabled students. Schools need to demonstrate an understanding of the social model and beyond (Finkelstein, 1980) and to work to remove all barriers to what limits or prevents the disabled students from enjoying the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers.

**Practice** – The statementing procedure needs to be reviewed and, in my opinion, there should not be the need for statementing, but teaching teams are to be given the authority to implement teaching in their classroom as an inclusive practice at their discretion, with

due accountability. This will give professional identity to members of team. This implies that placing the student and the education experience is central and necessitates a change in the very heart of how learning and teaching occur. It also means that teachers have to be actively involved. Equality of opportunity is not just about ensuring that opportunities are there for all of the students, it is about ensuring that everyone is able to access those opportunities.

One of the attributes of inclusive teachers and LSAs is the ability to collaboratively implement universal design for learning that accepts difference as the norm and is responsive to the diverse contexts of students' lives whilst ensuring that all students receive the best results possible.

**Finance** – funding mainstream schools so that we experience smaller classes, teaching teams in every class throughout our schools, providing flexible support, professional training, and the latest technology, including the upgrading of the physical environment. This research affirmed the need for reduced class size, adequate supports and more time for teachers and LSAs to meet to plan, create and evaluate the students together. This requires sufficient funding so that schools will be able to develop learning environments for students based on student needs instead of on the availability of funding. This is feasible in a country where the student population rate has diminished by 20% in the last decade (NSO 2007, 2010), creating space for smaller classrooms and providing more educational personnel to work with.

3. Innovate secondary education by providing flexible models of instruction where subject teacher and subject LSA provide engaging experiences for all students through the adoption of a universal design for learning. This research confirms that,

arguably, the single most variable in promoting the effectiveness of learning support and the associated professional development activities were values, ethos and school management.

4. Inclusive classrooms reflect high expectations, high achievements and the full participations of all students (Giangreco et al.,1993). This research has demonstrated that successful teaching teams challenge the students' abilities by setting good quality tasks, provide students with opportunities to choose their tasks, vary learning strategies and provide facilities that contribute to student learning (Ainscow, 1991). Until more is known about (a) the new National Curriculum Framework, whose draft was published last year (DQSE, 2010) and (b) the extent to which it is universally designed and useful for all students, refining and integrating the processes of the Student-Centred Appraisal of Needs and of Individual Educational Plans needs to put the focus on the disabled students' curriculum requirements and the human and financial resources necessary to support them. This would still be patchwork.
5. Implications for holistic teacher and LSA training focusing on inclusive education in the broader picture of educational change in order to accommodate all students' abilities in their mainstream classes that are both age and grade appropriate. Training should be located within a consistent and coherent management structure. It needs to be a whole school approach, with clearly identified roles and responsibilities around teachers' and LSAs' needs. Context-based training which is grounded in practice around methods on how to adapt the curriculum so that is accessible for all, the use of different resources and activities, and changes in pedagogies in the context of a quality of education for all, are a must. The pedagogy has to be guided by the philosophy of inclusion.
6. Providing for in-service training and continuing education to assist

teachers and LSAs to further their training and skills. The findings present a significant challenge in terms of training. Knowledge and skills can be taught, but teaching behaviours which characterize high quality interactions and collaboration between individuals is more problematic. The school on which this research is based addressed this challenge by giving a lot of attention and importance to the creation and maintenance of teaching teams, and on the challenges of teacher and LSA working in partnership. The school has formalized this both within the ambit of the recruitment of teachers and LSAs and with in-house staff development processes. Time is set aside for meetings and teaching teams are seen as a teaching and support units.

7. To engage schools in ongoing self-reflection through participatory research. The research confirms a supportive professional culture which allows teachers and LSAs to become confident and to have high expectations of their work, and to be held accountable for students' learning.
8. Lastly, but critically, there is the need to get the appropriate and representational networks and partnerships established towards the process of monitoring, in order to ensure effective implementation of inclusive schooling for disabled students. It would be appropriate for these reviews to focus on processes and outcomes against recognized leading practice. For example, they could assess and report on methods for managing resources to support all students and the way in which the school implements leading practices such as teaching teams, class analysis, student performance, monitoring, and partnership with parents.

This school offers an alternative model of an inclusive school where it is sometimes difficult to balance the individual rights of children in respect to their placement and their views on education (Lewis, 2004). Students attend

this school out of the choice of their parents. Parents' decision to enroll their son/s at this school is taken on the grounds that this school offers an alternative model of an inclusive school by offering an innovative approach to school management, which translates into allowing for possible changes brought about by valuing the education of disabled students. Their sons wear their uniform proudly, enjoy pertaining to the class, and thrive in the relationships built and in the empowerment to express their opinions. The school being researched has done things 'with' students rather than 'to' students. Consulting with the students has to be the way ahead as part of the process of inclusion. Mainstream staff and students can also benefit from inclusion if the ethos is right, if teachers and students involve themselves in problem-solving, which benefits all students (Ainsow 1999).

Inclusion is about participation, about finding ways to listen to the voices of all students (disabled and non-disabled), parents, teachers and LSAs. It also means responding to these views and voices by taking action in classrooms, playgrounds, corridors and staff rooms to address all students' requirements and expectations. It means having a student participation policy without any exceptions. It means having an open-door policy and seeing parents as resources, colleagues and equal partners in the education of their children. It requires seeing schools, not parents or students, as the "problem". It necessitates becoming reflective by asking critical questions about one's own practice. It is about the whole school becoming a community of learners, making learning accessible to everyone through a process of practice, challenge and innovation.

As I conclude this chapter I remember observing an eleven-year-old student carrying the label of global developmental delay, epilepsy and motor coordination difficulties (if one went by his statementing documents). He is entitled to one-to-one support and way back, when he received his 'statement of needs', his parents were advised to place him in a 'special school' because, according to the board, this boy would not benefit in a mainstream school as he required 'special' pedagogy such as a multisensory

environment, specialised therapy and assistive technology. His parents believed that their child should experience a mainstream school like his siblings, in spite of the board's recommendation.

In the playground I observed him surrounded by his classmates and another peer - his best friend who had been placed in a different class as from this year. He was playing with them and, when he felt like it, at other times he was chatting to his best friend using his communication book. The two were chatting about a sleep-over they were going to have that coming weekend, the food they would be eating, the computer games they were planning to play, and the film they were going to watch. They were enthusiastically flipping his communication book backwards and forwards throughout their animated conversation. Meanwhile, the others were calling them both to go and play with them. The students were calling his name, communicating with him and playing with him. Was he simply included against all odds or in spite of?

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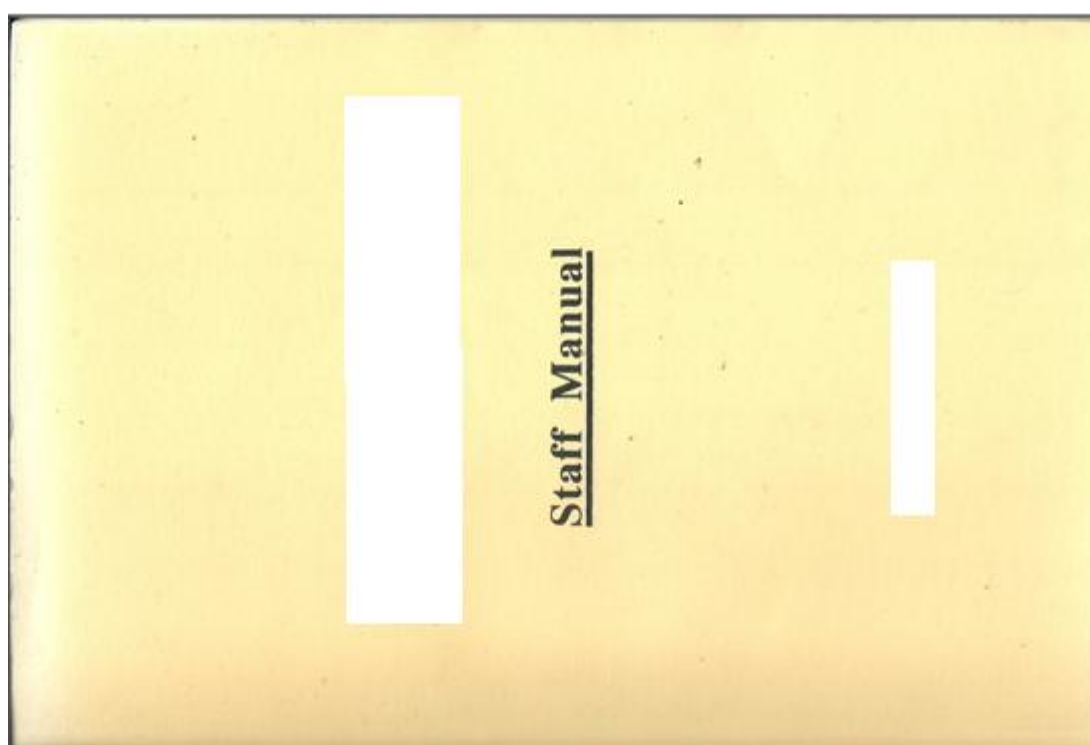
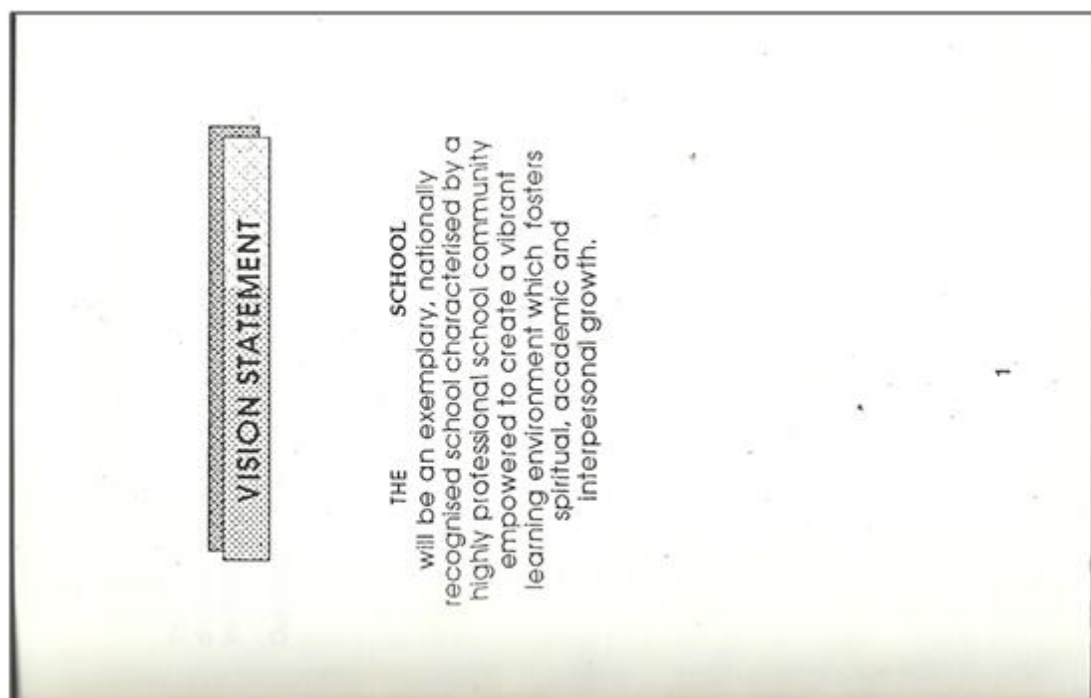
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## Appendix A

Excerpts from the School Staff Manual.



## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the School is to provide a disciplined academic and Christian education in the 300 year old tradition of the Christian Brothers.

Our mission is successful when our students

- (1) understand and accept themselves and others,
- (2) develop their talents in service to society and church,
- (3) think logically and critically and express themselves effectively,
- (4) know clearly what they believe and why they believe,
- (5) maintain physical fitness and mental health-avoiding excesses and abuses,
- (6) possess social awareness and a sense of responsibility for the common good,
- (7) are people of deep faith and prayer.

*The School  
is a good place for growing up !*

## School Staff Handbook

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A FEW THOUGHTS...

GLOBAL NUMBER OF SCHOOL HOURS 1996/97

## FOREWORD

*The purpose of this Staff Handbook is to express clearly the philosophy and objectives of a School, to define the responsibilities of administration, teachers and school staff, and to outline the procedures for school discipline and routine operations. A thorough knowledge of this information will provide each teacher with a guide for the orderly conduct of schools in the tradition established by the Patron of all teachers.*



## INTRODUCTION

The School is a Catholic school which aims to develop the spiritual, academic and athletic potential of the pupil in an atmosphere that creates the deepest respect for the individual. We seek to encourage our pupils to set and reach standards of learning of care, of behaviour, of work, of manner and appearance that reflect the Gospel message and the distinctive and Catholic spirit of the school.

The purpose of the staff handbook is largely to provide useful information concerning the organisation and administration of the school. This information is relevant, however, only in the context of a school whose staff is dedicated and committed to exemplifying those standards which the school sets for its students.

We do well to remind ourselves of our duties and responsibilities to our colleagues and to the parents who have entrusted their children to us. We expect the Headmaster and Deputies, Year Masters and Coordinators to manage and plan, efficiently and sensitively. The staff must expect of the Senior management openness, directness, purpose and good management. The need to consult before making decisions is important. The need to respect each member of the staff, is doubly so. The burden of making decisions will be more easily borne and appreciated if the decisions are properly and sensitively made.

We expect of the Year/Form Tutors, Heads of Departments, the organisation, thoroughness, energy, efficiency and vision that the children

deserve and should expect of those entrusted with such major responsibilities. Heads of Departments have the heavy responsibility to set high standards in their subjects; to ensure that appropriate matter is being taught and regularly checked; that accurate records are kept; that content and method fit the needs of individuals; that the school becomes a learning environment.

We rely on our Pastoral Teams Spiritual Directors to make the school a caring environment. The move from a discipline system to a pastoral system requires a great deal of human resources. Discipline is a matter for all staff. Lack of respect for fellow pupils is a matter for all staff. The good order in the classrooms, the corridors, and the playgrounds, are a matter for all staff. Each member of the staff is expected to play his/ her role in enhancing the self-respect of each pupil.

The staff hierarchy, of Senior and Middle management, of heads of departments etc., obscures the role and the contribution of the Main Professional Grade teacher, the class teacher. Yet it is in his class teacher that the pupil sees the worth of the school, its academic competence, its caring philosophy and the value of its rules. No greater responsibility can be placed on a teacher. The professionalism of the teacher, in the preparation, setting and marking of each pupil's work, will make the School a GOOD school. The respect of the teacher for each pupil will make the School a CARING school. The efforts of each teacher to maintain standards of work, of behaviour, of appearance, will determine the lightness of the burden that each one of us must share in bringing out the best in our pupils.

The information contained in this handbook is

designed to ease that burden by detailing the responsibilities, duties, procedures and systems that will bring good order to the school. Each one of us is asked to contribute fully to maintaining them and to improving them, and to prevent frustration undermining our effectiveness as a team.

Our professionalism, dedication and Christian values will stand or fall in the image we present as a staff. Central to this will be the respect we have for each pupil's self-esteem and dignity. Discipline is essential but it must never be harsh; rebuke must never be destructive of the person; the door to reconciliation must always be left open. These are standards we must set for ourselves, and support each other in attaining them. We can promote them in our relationships with one another.

By the way we reach these standards, so our school will be judged.

## thinking

1. The Teacher as the Minister of Grace  
 "Let it be clear, then in all your relations with the children who are entrusted to you that you look upon yourself as a minister of God, acting with a sincere and true zeal, accepting with much patience the difficulties you have to suffer..."  
**(M.T.R. 9.1)**  
 "Your zeal towards the children you teach would not go very far and would not have much result or success if it limited itself only to words. To be effective, your teaching must be supported by your example." **(M.T.R. 10.3)**
2. Union among the members of the staff  
 - Union in a 'community' is truly a precious gem. For this reason Our Lord recommended it to His Apostles with insistence before His death. When this is lost, all is lost. Hence, if you wish your 'community' to continue, preserve this virtue carefully." **(Med.)**
3. The Management of Schools.  
 "You must, then look upon this work entrusted to you by pastors, by fathers and mothers as one of the most important and necessary in the Church."  
**(M.T.R. 7.1)**  
 "Consider that it is only too common for the working class and the 'poor' to allow their children to live on their own... God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools."  
**(M.T.R. 2.1)**  
 - You must have an altogether special esteem for the Christian education and teaching of children... Such teaching is the very foundation and support of their religion. **(M.T.R. 7.3)**  
 "Are you thoroughly committed to...making a

strong impression on the minds of children?... From this moment take the steps to make it your main concern to teach perfectly the truths of the faith and the practical maxims of the holy Gospel. (M.T.R. 6.1)

"You too can perform miracles... by touching the hearts of children... by rendering your pupils obedient to and faithful in the practice of the maxims of the Gospel... by urging them to be industrious in school and at home." (M.T.R. 180.3)

"Jesus compares those who have care of souls to a Shepherd. One Lord says what distinguishes a good shepherd is that he knows all his sheep individually. This is also one of the essential qualities required of those who instruct others, for they must get to know their pupils and discern the manner in which to act towards them." (Med. 33)

"One thing that can contribute much to maintenance of order in schools is that there be well-kept registers, e.g. registers of the good and bad qualities of the pupil..." (Conduite, ch)

"The teacher will, from time to time, question some of the pupils following the same lesson to make sure they are attentive and that they understand." (Conduite, p.71)

"In order that no teacher may be mistaken in regard to the fitness of his pupils for promotion, all the teachers will examine, towards the end of each month, all pupils in all grades and in all sections..." (Conduite, p.21)

"A class 'prefect' shall observe everything which goes on in the class during the absence of the teacher... He will faithfully report to the teacher all that has transpired together with all their circumstances; he shall be exact in neither adding anything, nor leaving anything out." (Conduite, p.210)

"All the 'Officers' in each class shall be named by

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the teacher in each class, the first school day after the vacation..." (Conduite, p.212)

"From time to time the teachers will give rewards to those of their pupils who are the most exact in fulfilling their duties, in order to incite them to do so with pleasure and to stimulate the others by the hope of the reward... There are three kinds of rewards which will be given in the schools: First, rewards for piety. Second, rewards for ability. Third, rewards for assiduity. (Conduite, p.138)

#### 4. Concerning Corrections.

***"If it is desirable that a school be well regulated and in very good order, then punishments must be rare."*** (C.E.)

"The correction of students is one of the most consequential aspects of the School and concerning which must care should be taken that it be administered properly and with good results, not only on the part of the one receiving it, but on the part of the one administering it as well..." (Cahier, 24, p.140)

"Pupils may be, and sometimes ought to be, sent away from school; but this should be done only upon the advice of Brother Director. Those who should be sent away from school are the dissolute who are capable of ruining others:... the incorrigible, those who after having been corrected a great number of times, do not amend their conduct. It should, however, be an extraordinary occurrence to send a pupil away from school." (Cahier, 24, 148)

"To avoid frequent punishments, which are a source of great disorder in a school, it is necessary to note well that it is silence, restraint and watchfulness on the part of the teacher that establish and maintain good order in class, and not harshness and blows. A constant effort must be made to act with skill and ingenuity in order to keep the pupils in order while making almost no

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use of punishments." (Cahler 24, p.149)  
 The entire second part of the "Conduite des Ecoles" is devoted to the following theme: "Means of establishing and maintaining order in the schools."  
 In the Preface of the "Conduite" of 1720, . . .  
 . . . in this way:

*"The . . . will apply themselves with great care to being faithful to observe all that is contained and prescribed for them herein, persuaded that they will have order in class only to the extent that they are exact in not omitting anything, and that they receive this book as being their gift from God..."*

## ORGANISATION

has three sections : the Junior, the Senior Sections and the Sixth Form.

In the three sections there is a Master in charge/ Deputy Head . responsible for its administration. The Director/Headmaster exercises control over the three sections and the three deputies negotiating curriculum and management responsibilities.

The Sixth Form caters for students doing Post O-Level studies.

The Senior Section caters for students in Form One to Five. The Junior Section caters for students in Years One to Six.

The Headmaster with the Deputy Heads direct a team of Year Tutors who have the responsibility for the welfare of each year group. The Head of Sixth Form directs a team of Tutors.

The Year Tutors direct a team of Form teachers and Subject Teachers.

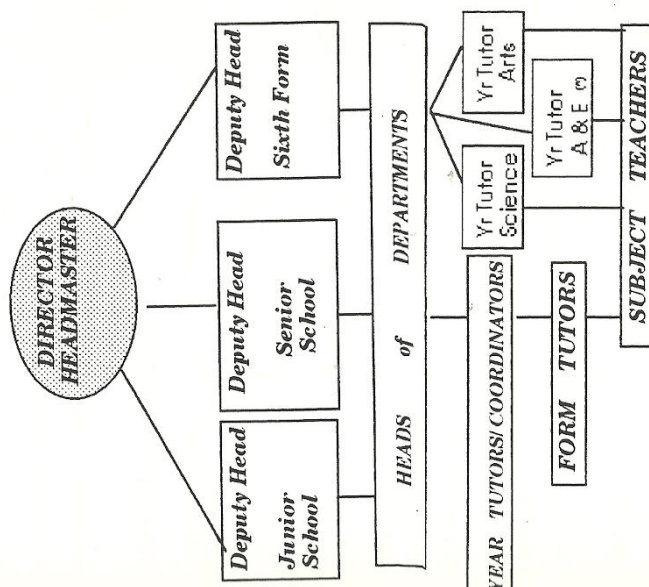
Senior Sections . . . has two sections : the Junior and the

The Senior Section caters for students in Form One to Five. The Junior Section caters for students in Years Three to Six. St.Benedict's- Year 1 and Year 2.

The Director/Headmaster with the Deputy Heads direct a team of Form/Class Tutors/Coordinators who have the responsibility for the welfare of each year group.

The Form/ Class Tutors/Coordinators direct a team of Form Tutors and Subject Teachers.

## MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



(\*)Accounts and Economics

## POSITIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

This concept has several essential elements, namely:

- \* an agreed system of curriculum delivery which aims to create a harmonious learning environment
- \* a code of behaviour which is known and accepted.
- \* consistent implementation of this at all levels
- \* acknowledgment of these who keep the spirit of the code
- \* deliberate teaching to develop self-discipline and responsibility
- \* correction of behaviour that is outside the code.
- \* School Policy
- \* Sets out the general goals of the school
- \* outline how the School expect to achieve those goals
- \* provide a framework within which action can be taken in a consistent way;
- \* lets the school community know what is aimed for and what can be expected of the school.

it does represent an essential condition in the educative process. The prudent teacher is more concerned about preventing the development of discipline problems than about providing remedies after they have developed. Preventive discipline implies thorough preparation of lessons to make them as interesting and challenging as possible, a foresight that plans exactly what is to be done at various times through the class period.

- a) Students should never be left without supervision in the classroom or any area of the school. The teacher should never allow himself to become so preoccupied with an individual student as to lose sight of the whole class.
- b) No students may leave his seat without the permission of the teacher.
- c) Students should not ordinarily come to the teacher's desk during class time for explanations or any other purpose. On occasions when the class is busy, it is permissible to have one student approach the desk at a time, or the teacher may see the student at his desk.
- d) If class discussion creates disorder, this particular method should be delayed until students are trained to a more mature attitude.
- e) The lessons should not proceed while there is talking or disorder in class. The teacher will call the class to attention in a serious, determined and authoritative but not loud manner.
- f) Each lesson should be started and terminated promptly. However the students

should understand that they may not consider the lesson ended at the sound of the bell, but only at the indication of the teacher. The teacher should accompany the class to the yard at break time and also (V. Imp.) at the end of the school day.

- g) The teacher may never dismiss a boy from class.
- j) Never make threats that you cannot or will not carry out.
- i) General reprimands should be used only very rarely, and then only when a considerable majority are involved in wrongdoing.
- k) Never discuss pupils' misbehaviour publicly in the staff room.

#### 4. REFERRAL

- a) If problems persist, the Form Teacher should be given the opportunity to remedy them. It is an underestimation of the Form teacher to regard him/her as a marker of registers etc. To develop any meaningful relationship with boys, the Form Teacher needs information about and involvement in discipline problems concerning his/her class.
- b) Only if problems cannot be resolved the teacher and the Form teacher should the Year Tutor be brought in. One must avoid sending pupils to Year Tutors unnecessarily. At this stage a parental contact would be very probable and a serious appraisal of reasons for constant in discipline has to be initiated.

- c) The next line of discipline is the Head of School - in conjunction with the Deputy Head. At this stage a radical solution to problems would be more likely- a suspension; curriculum change; exclusion until parents bring the boys in to discuss problems. The school might have to involve outside agencies- Education Welfare Officer, Educational Psychologist, Counsellors- etc..

Year Tutors and Heads of school regularly discuss discipline problems at their weekly meetings- and if necessary the problem children are brought before the meeting which will then assume the responsibilities of a Disciplinary Board.

- d) We believe that written referral places an unnecessary burden on staff. However, it is important that information about pupils should be entered in a special book (Report Book - Year Tutor's Office) at the earliest possible moment. Such documentation is important both for giving accurate report to parents and for accumulating information for outside agencies.

#### 5. DISCIPLINE/ GUIDANCE UNIT : Lower School (I,II,III)

In exceptional circumstances, and if the staffing is available, it may be possible to establish a unit which could have the following uses:

- a) for pupils who are disruptive in the normal classroom situation.
- b) for pupils who have returned from suspension and need to be detained for in-school discipline.

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- c) for pupils who would normally be sent home for serious misbehaviour but whose parents are not at home.

It is possible that the Unit could be developed into a Guidance Unit if staffing was available.

#### 6. REVIEW \* UPPER SCHOOL ( IV's & V's )

The Deputy Head i/c, the Year Tutors team undertakes an academic review of each pupil's progress regularly and recommend appropriate changes of course and/of scheme to fit each pupil to his abilities and needs. In addition pupils may be rewarded and encouraged, or parents asked to discuss their son's progress.

#### 7. PROGRESS COMMITTEE : SIXTH FORM

The results of Sixth Form students are reviewed after each examination. Under the direction of the Head of the Sixth Form, Tutors and subject teachers consider the appropriate course of action and counselling for students who give cause for concern.

#### 8. SANCTIONS

Boys in difficulty may be 'spoken' to by staff, referred to Form Tutors and with continued offences referred to Year Tutors or Heads of School. Various additional sanctions may result. A poor response to homework or class work may merit a 'long detention' to rewrite set work or improve the performance. A Deputy Head/ Year

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Tutor may use this detention for persistent offenders.

There are other 'short' detentions for minor disciplinary reasons such as failure to observe uniform regulations, 'social' offences such as discourtesy, untidiness, lack of consideration, are treated by involving the pupil in some 'social service' to the school community.

Twenty four hour notice will be given for 'long' detentions.

An offender who requires more personal attention may be directed to attend Saturday morning detention.

Pupils who are persistent in disruption may be put "on Report" for comments on behaviour in each lesson. The Year Tutor and parents must see and sign this Report each day.

When all else fails or the offence is serious the Headmaster may exclude a boy from school. A pupil may not be sent home without previously notification to the parents.

The Headmaster reserves the right to exclude from the school boys who are persistent offenders or whose conduct is prejudicial to the rest of the school.

#### 9. DETENTION SYSTEM

A detention system will operate on four nights a week. An hour's detention requires a twenty four hours notice to be given to the pupil.

Work must be given for the pupil to do.

Staff should not put more than three boys in the school detention in any one lesson, but they may, of course, hold their own detention as they require.

A school detention would take precedence over a

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private detention, as would representing the school in any sport. A team practice would not take precedence over a school or private detention.

The names of the boys required to do full school detention should be entered in the appropriate form in the staff room. Year Tutors and Deputy Heads will check and monitor attendance at detention.

#### 10. MERIT SYSTEM

There should be two distinct merit systems; one for the Lower (I,II,III) and another for the Upper (IV,V) school.

Forms I, II, & III are able to receive merit certificates for attendance, punctuality, appearance and any service they render to the school, monitored regularly throughout the year. In addition departments will have at their disposal a number of merit prizes, to be awarded half- termly, for pupils deemed worthy of them.

The merit system will function under the direction of the Deputy Head.

For Forms IV & V, the Deputy Head and Year Tutors operate their own system of reward.

#### 11. CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

a) Each member of the staff is responsible for his/her own discipline in the classroom situation. Any misbehaviour must be dealt with by the teacher concerned. Before seeking other help the actions taken to deal with any particular problem or pupil must be clearly seen.

b) If misbehaviour that disrupts a class continues from lesson to lesson the first stage should be

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seek the help of the Year Tutor.

- c) While seeking help it must be emphasised that each teacher is legally responsible for all the pupils confided to their care for full time of the lesson. The teacher remains legally responsible for the conduct and safety of any pupil from his/her class.
- d) The Headmaster alone has the power to exclude pupils from school but he may delegate this power to the Deputy Heads.
- e) When it appears that a particular pupil has become a problem in a particular lesson, his Form Tutor should be informed. The record kept by the Form Tutor will identify whether the problem is general or in particular lessons.
- f) An interview with the Form Tutor may be sufficient to arrest the misbehaviour.
- g) In the light of a more serious or deep seated problem the Form Tutor may seek the help of the Year Tutor - indicating action that has been taken and the results.
- g) It should be noted that sending to Year Tutor/ Deputy Heads of school should be arranged in advance as a special exercise. It is not proper to send a boy to stand outside an office and expect him to be dealt with when no explanation is provided.
- h) Corporal punishment and other form of violence, be it physical and psychological, are strictly out!

## 12. CRISIS MANAGEMENT

When the Deputies and Year Tutors consider that a more serious view should be taken, the pupil may be referred to the Disciplinary Board- made up of the Deputies and Year Tutors chaired by the Head. The following are examples of behaviour which are not acceptable and which the teacher should deal with instantly by referring the

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incident to a senior member of the staff:

- verbal abuse from a pupil
- physical assault or threat from a pupil
- pupil fighting, in or out of class
- open defiance of instructions

In these circumstances the matter should be referred to the Head of School. A list of the pupils to appear before the Disciplinary Board is pinned in the staff room, and any member of the staff, who so wishes, could contribute to the defence or otherwise of the offender.

When any of the offences listed above occur, the pupil concerned should be instructed to wait outside the classroom. Another pupil may be sent to ask the Head of School or the Year Tutor to come to the class.



## SUMMARY

- a) The Year Tutor is NOT responsible for the day to day class discipline for any teacher.
- b) The Year Tutor is not responsible for pupils' failure to do homework etc. Both of them are primarily teacher/ form tutor responsibilities.
- c) The teacher's own class disciplinary actions - e.g. extra work, detention etc., remains the best method of remedying failure to do one's duty. No meaningless copying!
- d) Finally, staff are reminded that all forms of corporal punishment are illegal. Any physical reprimand or chastisement may constitute an assault determinable by the Courts.

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## **Appendix B**

### **Overview of Maltese history and development of the education system**

History shows Malta to be a tiny island in the middle of the Mediterranean, where compassion is shown to strangers, who are easily welcomed into the community. Yet with a look at the extensive efforts and commitments that have been employed to bring about inclusive education, it is hard not to question at what point in history exclusion became favoured.

Malta's geographical location being situated in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea has made it a prime target for colonisers throughout history. Malta has been a colony of the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Normans, the Knights of St. John, the French and the British. The Maltese archipelago is made up of five small islands, two of which, namely Malta and Gozo, are inhabited by an approximate population of 410,000. Since 1974 Malta is a republic and since 2004 has been a member of the European Union. Malta's colonial ties and the Roman Catholic Church have influenced many of the changes in education. The Roman Catholic Church throughout history up until today exerts a profound influence on every aspect of Maltese life.

Ever since the Second World War, two parties, the Nationalist party and the Labour party have dominated politics. General elections are held every five years with an exceptionally high turnout. The elections are always very close, with one party winning by a majority of only a few thousand votes. This results in both parties taking any measures they deem fit to safeguard voter loyalty, which sometimes leads to the deferral of necessary, but unpopular decisions. At the present time, we are witnessing a period of transition in Maltese society. Long-held ideas, traditions, lifestyles and beliefs are increasingly being questioned and sometimes attacked. Not all change is positive; it can be negative as well. However, if we really seek progress, we have to be open and receptive to innovation, to ideas and concepts that may seem strange at first, because of their very novelty. The crux of the

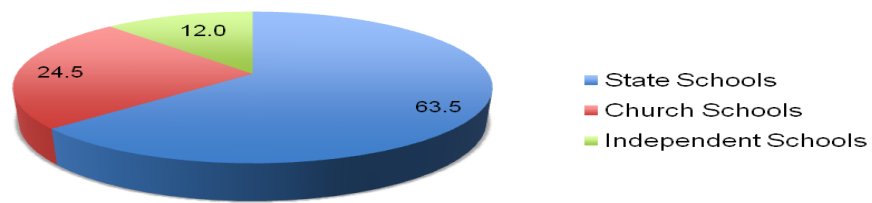
argument is to keep an open mind towards change. To reject something even before it starts being discussed is a negation of democracy and a negation of the dignity and respect we should accord to others.

## **Education in Malta**

The following provides an insight into the developments of the Maltese educational system. The introduction of compulsory education in the 1950s ensured that every child aged 5 to 14 had access to schooling. At the end of primary education, at about the age of 10 or 11, students sat for an examination to determine their future. Those who were successful would enter secondary education. Those who were not would keep repeating the last class in primary, until they were either successful or turned fourteen. The other option was fee-paying education, out of reach for many families. The 1970s saw the implementation of secondary education for all students together with increasing the age of compulsory education to 16, thus extending the concept of the universal right to education. Streaming seems to be a direct result of the formal assessment procedures in our primary and secondary schools, which in turn has been the main protagonist for the mentality of exclusion. During this time state supported kindergartens were also established. The education act of 1974, revised in 1988, gave disabled children the right to a public education further establishing education as a right (Zammit Mangion, 1992).

The Maltese Educational System comprises of three sectors, namely State, Church and Independent. The state sector is the largest sector and all schools are non-continuous, therefore, pupils need to transfer from primary school to a different secondary school. The church sector is the second largest educational sector and has both continuous and non-continuous schools. The independent sector has both continuous and non-continuous schools, which are all fee paying. According to the Spiteri report, June 2005,

State schools cater for 63.5% of the school population, the Church schools cater for 24.5% and the Independent schools cater for 12%.



Graph 1  
Schools in Malta

## Appendix C

### Consent Forms

#### **Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

School of Health, Community, and Educations Studies  
Part-Time Research PhD Programme  
Northumbria University

#### ***A Case Study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity: Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability***

#### Participant Information Sheet for 'Questionnaires for Parents & Students'

You are being invited to take part in a research study being carried out at our college. Before you decide to participate in the study it is important for you to understand the part you will play should you choose to do so. The case study will involve your child filling out questionnaires.

You are under no obligation to participate in the study; non-participation will not affect the service that your child receives at school. However if you do choose to take part it will be very much appreciated and you will be given further information with regards to the nature of the research. Those who choose to participate will be asked to sign a consent form so that any data collected can be published. You and your child are free to leave the study and withdraw your consent at any time without giving an explanation. The study will be confidential and the names of those taking part will not be used.

This research intends to evaluate the experiences of Stella Maris College, which over the last fifteen years, has moved from main streaming to integration and now to inclusion. The study will investigate the following points:

1. The practices within the college that enable inclusion
2. The experiences of the stake holders
3. How persons are perceived, regardless of their abilities or impairments
4. The students' sense of self-being, and how this is enhanced and developed
5. Whether students become participating members of the college, and if so, how they do so.

You are being asked to give your opinions on the inclusion of students with individual needs in the college, by answering questions in the form of a questionnaire. Parents being invited to complete questionnaires may do so at home. This exercise will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. Parents of students attending the college will be invited to participate. The aim of the questionnaire is to find out about the attitudes and perceptions of parents regarding the Inclusion Policy adopted by the college. The questionnaires will explore evaluation practices that

either support or hinder the values and practices of inclusive schooling. You are invited to send your completed questionnaire in the stamped addressed enveloped provided, so that your participation will remain anonymous.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, information you provide will be kept secure and will be destroyed upon completion of the research study.

Should you wish to take part in the study please return the consent form within 3 weeks of receipt.

Many thanks,  
Charmaine Agius Ferrante

E-mail address: [ferrante@waldonet.net.mt](mailto:ferrante@waldonet.net.mt)  
Mobile no. 9949 0491  
Home no. 21454115

**Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

School of Health, Community, and Educations Studies  
Part-Time Research PhD Programme  
Northumbria University

**'A Case Study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity:  
Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability'**

Participant Information Sheet for 'Focus Groups'

You are being invited to take part in a research study being carried out at our college. Before you decide to participate in the study it is important for you to understand the part you will play should you choose to do so. The case study will involve you either completing questionnaires, taking part in focus groups, being interviewed, or being observed.

You are under no obligation to participate in the study; non-participation will not affect the service that the child receives at school or the roles of any staff. However if you do choose to take part it will be very much appreciated and you will be given further information with regards to the nature of the research. Those who choose to participate will be asked to sign a consent form so that any data collected can be published. You are free to leave the study and withdraw your consent at any time without giving an explanation. The study will be confidential and the names of the participants will not be used.

This research intends to evaluate the experiences of Stella Maris College, which over the last fifteen years, has moved from main streaming to integration and now to inclusion. The study will investigate the following points:

1. The practices within the college that enable inclusion
2. The experiences of the stake holders
3. How persons are perceived, regardless of their abilities or disabilities
4. The students' sense of well-being, and how this is enhanced and developed
5. Whether students become participating members of the college, and if so, how they do so.

You are being asked to discuss the challenges of teaching a diverse group of students, paying particular attention to the diverse learning styles, abilities, and disabled students in the college.

Focus groups will consist of teacher-facilitator teams of all the school teaching staff. The aim of the focus groups is to explore how the teacher-facilitator teams are supporting the learning of a diverse population of students and its implications.

The discussions will elicit in-depth information regarding the goals and aims of the school and other unstated goals or intentions. Those taking part in the focus groups will discuss different themes as proposed by the researcher. The discussion will take approximately 60 minutes and will be held at the college (time and room allocation will be specified). With your permission the discussions will be recorded and transcribed. Names will be changed after transcription. In accordance with the Data Protection Act, information you provide will be kept secure and will be destroyed upon completion of the research study. Should you wish to take part in the study please return the consent form within 3 weeks of receipt.

Many thanks,  
Charmaine Agius Ferrante

E-mail address: [ferrante@waldonet.net.mt](mailto:ferrante@waldonet.net.mt)  
Mobile no. 9949 0491  
Home no. 21454115



**Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

School of Health, Community, and Educational Studies  
Part-Time Research PhD Programme  
Northumbria University

**'A Case Study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity:  
Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability'**

Participant Information Sheet for 'Interviews'

You are being invited to take part in a research study being carried out at our college. Before you decide to participate in the study it is important for you to understand the part you will play should you choose to do so. The case study will involve you either completing questionnaires, taking part in focus groups, being interviewed, or being observed.

You are under no obligation to participate in the study; non-participation will not affect the service that the child receives at school or the roles of any staff. However if you do choose to take part it will be very much appreciated and you will be given further information with regards to the nature of the research. Those who choose to participate will be asked to sign a consent form so that any data collected can be published. You are free to leave the study and withdraw your consent at any time without giving an explanation. The study will be confidential and your name will not be used.

This research intends to evaluate the experiences of Stella Maris College, which over the last fifteen years, has moved from main streaming to integration and now to inclusion. The study will investigate the following points:

1. The practices within the college that enable inclusion
2. The experiences of the stake holders
3. How persons are perceived, regardless of their abilities or impairments
4. The students' sense of self-being, and how this is enhanced and developed
5. Whether students become participating members of the college, and if so, how they do so.

You are being asked to participate in answering a set of questions that intend to explore the impact that inclusion is having upon school culture, policy and practice.

The aim of these interviews is to assess the management's views and beliefs about the inclusion of students with individual educational needs within the school environment.

Interviews with the administration staff will involve answering specific questions on a one to one basis with the researcher. All senior administration will be invited to participate in the interviews. The researcher hopes to gain an insight into whether or not, at the administrative level, the inclusive school journey embraces the idea that since everyone is an individual, the school is organised so that teaching and learning is experienced in such a way that each student receives a valued learning experience. Interviews will take approximately 45 minutes and will take place on school premises (time and room allocation will be specified). Interviews will be recorded with the permission of the interviewee and transcribed. The transcript will be given to the interviewee to check for accuracy. Names will be changed when writing up the analysis. You may withdraw from the study even after having accepted to take part. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. You can talk to me by phone. I am more than happy to provide further information on the study if required.

Many thanks,  
Charmaine Agius Ferrante

E-mail address: [ferrante@waldonet.net.mt](mailto:ferrante@waldonet.net.mt)  
Mobile no. 9949 0491  
Home no. 21454115

**Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

School of Health, Community, and Education Studies  
Part-Time Research PhD Programme  
Northumbria University

**'A Case Study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity:  
Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability'**

Participant Information Sheet for 'Structured Observations of  
Students with Individual Needs in the Playground'

You are being invited to take part in a research study being carried out at our college. Before you decide to participate in the study it is important for you to understand the part you will play should you choose to do so. The case study will involve your child either completing questionnaires, taking part in focus groups, being interviewed, or being observed.

You are under no obligation to participate in the study; non-participation will not affect the service that the child receives at school or the roles of any staff. However if you do choose to take part it will be very much appreciated and you will be given further information with regards to the nature of the research. Those who choose to participate will be asked to sign a consent form so that any data collected can be published. You and your child are free to leave the study and withdraw your consent at any time without giving an explanation. The study will be confidential and names will not be used.

This research intends to evaluate the experiences of Stella Maris College, which over the last fifteen years, has moved from main streaming to integration and now to inclusion. The study will investigate the following points:

1. The practices within the college that enable inclusion
2. The experiences of the stake holders
3. How persons are perceived, regardless of their abilities or impairments
4. The students' sense of self-being, and how this is enhanced and developed
5. Whether students become participating members of the college, and if so, how they do so.

You are being asked to give permission for your child to be observed during school hours, with the intention of assessing their level of inclusion in school break time. In order to address the research questions above, both qualitative and quantitative methods will be applied using different data collecting tools; namely questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and structured observations.

### Structured Observations of Students with Individual Needs in the Playground

The aim of the observations is to assess the level of inclusion of students with individual educational needs within a social context. Your child, having a statement of individual educational need will be observed on three separate occasions during the third term. The researcher will be looking for evidence of inclusion, for example; Is your son playing with his classmates? Is your son where he is meant to be at break time? Does your son have a means of communication with his peers? Does your son have the same accessories (namely playing balls, etc.) as his classmates? Does your son obey the rules of break time? The researcher to collect this information will use checklists.

These checklists will not have the child's identity recorded on them, and the analysis of the data will be anonymous. All checklists will be stored in a locked box until the end of the research project, when they will be destroyed.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, the information you provide will be kept secure and will be destroyed upon completion of the research study. Should you wish to take part in the study please return the consent form within 3 weeks of receipt.

Many Thanks,  
Charmaine Agius Ferrante

E-mail address: [ferrante@waldonet.net.mt](mailto:ferrante@waldonet.net.mt)  
Mobile no. 9949 0491  
Home no. 21454115

**Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

School of Health, Community, and Educational Studies  
Part-Time Research PhD Programme  
Northumbria University

**'A Case Study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity:  
Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability'**

Consent Form for 'Focus Groups'

Research Study: A case study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity: Whole School  
Approach Using the Social Model of Disability

Name of Researcher: Charmaine Agius Ferrante

Please return this consent form in the separate stamped addressed envelope provided,  
do not send it with the questionnaire.

**Please initial each box, if you agree**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet relating to the  
above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask  
questions and have had these answered to my satisfaction.

☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw  
at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.

☐

3. I understand that relevant sections of any of the data collected during the study  
may be looked at by responsible individuals and regulatory authorities from the  
University of Malta and from Northumbria University. I give permission for these  
individuals to have access to the data. I understand that my results will be kept  
confidential and anonymous.

☐

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant                      Date                      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent/ Guardian of Participant                      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher                      Date                      Signature

**Participant's Number for this Study:**

**Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

School of Health, Community, and Education Studies  
Part-Time Research PhD Programme  
Northumbria University

**'A Case Study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity:  
Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability'**

Consent Form for 'Structured Observations'

Research Study: A case study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity: Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability

Name of Researcher: Charmaine Agius Ferrante

Please return this consent form in the separate stamped addressed envelope provided, by **March 1<sup>st</sup>**.

**Please initial each box, if you agree**

1. I understand that I have been asked to allow for the observation of my child during school break times for the period of 2 days. I have had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the proposed procedures and have had these questions answered to my satisfaction.

☐

2. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet relating to the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered to my satisfaction.

☐

3. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw him at any time, without giving any reason, without my or my child's legal rights being affected.

☐

4. I understand that relevant sections of any of the data collected during the study may be looked at by responsible individuals and regulatory authorities from the University of Malta and from Northumbria University. I give permission for these individuals to have access to the data. I understand that my child's results will be kept confidential and anonymous.

☐

5. I agree to allow my son to participate in the above study.

☐

6. I confirm that I have explained the proposed study to my son, and that he is comfortable to take part in the study.

☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent/ Guardian of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**Participant's Number for this Study:**  
**(For Office Use only)**



**Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

School of Health, Community, and Education Studies  
Part-Time Research PhD Programme  
Northumbria University

**'A Case Study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity:  
Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability'**

**Consent Form for 'Questionnaires'**

Research Study: A case study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity: Whole School  
Approach Using the Social Model of Disability

Name of Researcher: Charmaine Agius Ferrante

Please return this consent form in the separate stamped addressed envelope provided,  
do not send it with the questionnaire.

**Please initial each box, if you agree**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet relating to the  
above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask  
questions and have had these answered to my satisfaction.

☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw  
at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.

☐

3. I understand that relevant sections of any of the data collected during the study  
may be looked at by responsible individuals and regulatory authorities from the  
University of Malta and from Northumbria University. I give permission for these  
individuals to have access to the data. I understand that my results will be kept  
confidential and anonymous.

☐

4. I agree to take part in the above study/ I agree to allow my son to participate in  
the above study.

☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant                      Date                      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent/ Guardian of Participant                      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher                      Date                      Signature

**Participant's Number for this Study:**  
**(For Office Use only)**

**Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

School of Health, Community, and Education Studies  
Part-Time Research PhD Programme  
Northumbria University

**'A Case Study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity:  
Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability'**

Discussion Guidelines for Focus Groups with Teacher-Facilitator Teams

The aim of the focus groups is to explore how the teacher-facilitator teams are supporting the learning of a diverse population of students and its implications. The following will be addressed in the group discussions:

- What are the opportunities and difficulties you encounter working together to support the learning of all students in your class?
- What teaching strategies do you use to suit the subject, the size of the group and the students' understanding?
- What do you feel is the level of participation of student/students with individual educational needs?
- To what extent do you involve the students in group work?
- What evaluative measures are in place?
- What kind of extra work does including students with individual educational needs in the class entail?
- What effect do students with individual educational needs have on the rest of the class?
- What extent do you encourage the involvement of parents/carers in their child's learning?
- What supports are in place towards your own development?
- How would you envisage better inclusive practices in the future?

**Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

School of Health, Community, and Educational Studies  
Part-Time Research PhD Programme  
Northumbria University

**'A Case Study of Inclusion, Respect and Dignity:  
Whole School Approach Using the Social Model of Disability'**


Interview Schedules for Professionals in Administration

The aim of these interviews is to assess the management's views and beliefs about the inclusion of students with individual educational needs within the school environment. To assess attitudes the following will be investigated:

- How does the school mission reflect an acceptance and nurture the learning of all students?
- What is your policy on inclusive education?
- Why did you decide to embrace inclusion?
- Do you feel you should have separate policies for students with individual educational needs?
- How are new students and their families helped to feel welcome in the school?
- Do you feel there is a partnership between staff and parents/carers?
- How are parents/carers given the opportunity to be actively involved in the school and in the decisions taken?
- How do you accommodate student differences?
- In what ways are you a "student-centered" school?
- What evaluative measures are used to judge the performance and progress of both students and teachers?
- How does the structure of the day encourage collaboration?
- To what extent are students engaged and supported?
- How would you envisage better inclusive practices in the future?

## Appendix D

### Questionnaire for parents of disabled students

	<b>STELLA MARIS COLLEGE GZIRA</b> Questionnaire
---	--

1. Do you feel that your son is valued by the school?

☐ yes

☐ no

---

2. Do you feel the school takes your concerns seriously?

☐ yes

☐ no

---

3. Do you think that placing students with disabilities in school is a good idea?

☐ yes

☐ no

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

---

4. What concerns do (did) you have about your son being with students with different abilities and disabilities?

---

---

---

---

5. Do you still have these concerns?

☐ yes

☐ no

---

6. What things do you like about your son attending this school?

---

---

7. How do you think your son feels about being in a classroom where there are students with disabilities?

---

---

---

8. What concerns, if any, does your son have about being in this classroom?

---

---

---

9. How could these concerns be addressed?

---

---

---

10. What do you think about the educational programme your son is receiving?

---

---

---

11. How has being in an inclusive classroom affected your son **academically, socially** and **behaviourally**? Please describe any benefits and/or negative consequences you have observed in your son?

Benefits	Negative consequences

12. Were you consulted about the inclusion process?

☐ **yes**

☐ **no**

13. What things seem to prevent inclusion from working well?

a. An open door policy. ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

(Do you feel comfortable to come to school when you need to?)

b. Good communication. ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

c. Having common goals. ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

d. Feeling a part of the school team. ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

e. (i) Continuous assessments ☐ **yes** ☐ **no** ☐ **N/A**

(ii) Continuous examinations ☐ **yes** ☐ **no** ☐ **N/A**

f. Extracurricular activities ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

g. Having friends ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

14. Name any things that seem not to make inclusion work at school?

---

---

15. In what way do you think our inclusion process can improve?

---

---

---

16. How do rate communication between teacher/facilitator team and yourself?

☐ **good**      ☐ **fairly good**      ☐ **poor**

17. How do you rate communication between yourself and school?

☐ **good**      ☐ **fairly good**      ☐ **poor**



## Appendix E

### Junior School Questionnaire

✖ Mark box to match your feelings

	😊	😐	☹
I have many good friends			
I feel I a part of my class			
I receive help from the teachers and facilitators when I need it			
My work is displayed			
I am liked for being me			
I feel teachers and facilitators like me			
I am encouraged to do my best			
I am encouraged to take pride in my own achievements			
I feel school staff treat me with respect			
If I have a difficulty I know it will be seen to			

How do you feel when you help your classmates?

---



---



---

How do you feel when your classmates help you?

---



---



---

How do you feel about having children in class who need special attention?

---



---



---

## Appendix F

### Senior School Questionnaire

1. Rate on the scale how you feel about the following:

	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Always</b>
I have many good friends					
I feel I belong in this class					
I receive help from the teachers and facilitators when I ask					
My work is displayed					
I am valued for being me					
I feel teachers and facilitators like me					
I am encouraged to achieve					
I am encouraged to take pride in my own achievements					
I feel school staff treat me with respect					
If I have a difficulty I know it will be addressed					

2. Are disability issues discussed with you?

---

---

---

3. Do you feel that the school has answered your questions regarding disabilities?

---

---

---

4. Do you see yourself as alike to disabled students, or very different from? Why do you feel this way?

---

---

---

5. What does inclusion mean to you?

---

---

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6. In what way can inclusion in the school be improved upon?

---

---

---

7. Do any of your close friends have learning difficulties?  
No

Yes ☐

☐

If 'yes', do you socialise with them outside school?  
No

Yes ☐

☐

If so, where?

---

## Appendix G

### Teachers' Questionnaire

#### School of Health, Community and Education Studies

#### Part-Time Research PhD Programme

#### Northumbria University

#### *How is your attitude toward accommodating differently-abled students?*

		I have arrived!	I am working on this	I do not believe this is possible	I am not prepared to deal with this
1	I respect students with disabilities as individuals with differences as I respect all children in my classroom.				
2	I am aware of the individual capabilities of students and adapt accordingly.				
3	I establish routines appropriate for students with disabilities (establish settings so children know what is consistently expected).				
4	I employ classroom management strategies that are effective with students with disabilities (e.g. Time out, point systems, etc.).				
5	I consciously provide reinforcement and encouragement (e.g. Encourage effort, provide support if student gets discouraged, emphasize positive gains).				

		I have arrived!	I am working on this	I do not believe this is possible	I am not prepared to deal with this
6	I attempt to determine students' interests and strengths and connect personally with students.				
7	I help students of all abilities learn to find appropriate avenues to express feelings and needs (drawings, sign language, time outs etc.).				
8	I am comfortable communicating with students with disabilities (plan frequent, short, one-to-one conferences, discuss potential modifications).				
9	I am comfortable communicating with the special education teacher (e.g. Write notes back and forth, talk informally, collaborate during allotted prep time).				
10	I communicate with parents of students with or without disabilities (e.g. Write notes back and forth, talk informally, encourage them to provide support for student's education).				
11	I expect the best from all students in the classroom and am aware of their capabilities.				
12	I am able to make adaptations for students when developing long-range (yearly/unit) plans (e.g. Establish realistic long-term objectives).				

		I have arrived!	I am working on this	I do not believe this is possible	I am not prepared to deal with this
13	I consciously make adaptations for students when planning daily activities, being aware of potential problems before they occur.				
14	I plan assignments and activities that allow students with and without disabilities to be successful (structure assignments to reduce frustration).				
15	I strive to allot time for teaching successful strategies as well as content material (test-taking skills, note-taking skills).				
16	I adjust the physical arrangements of room for students with disabilities (modify seating arrangements, provide space for movement).				
17	I construct study guides, tape record readings, and provide skeletal outlines and hands-on activities for classroom members.				
18	I am able to use alternative materials for learners (variety of textbooks, supplemental readers, calculators).				
19	I encourage students to use computers for word processing or skill development.				

		I have arrived!	I am working on this	I do not believe this is possible	I am not prepared to deal with this
20	I allow time to monitor the students' understanding of directions and assigned tasks (ask children to repeat or demonstrate what I have asked them to do, check in with students to be sure they are performing assignments correctly).				
21	I observe students' understanding of concepts presented in class (attend to, comment on and reinforce understanding of vocabulary, abstract ideas, key words, time sequences and content organisation).				
22	I provide individual instruction for students as needed (plan for one-to-one sessions after schools, allocate time for individual instruction during class, provide cross-age tutoring).				
23	I pair students of all abilities with peers to assist with assignments, projects, provide role models for behaviour, academics and social interaction.				
24	I involve students in active learning and in cooperative learning groups of mixed abilities.				
25	I encourage students of all abilities to participate in whole-group instructions.				

		I have arrived!	I am working on this	I do not believe this is possible	I am not prepared to deal with this
26	I consciously provide extra time for students to process information and complete tasks.				
27	I am comfortable breaking down assignments into smaller chunks to lessen frustration and ensure success.				
28	I observe students in groups and individually, documenting progress and interaction.				
29	I collect a variety of work samples from students which reflect progress and growth.				
30	I conference with students to provide one-to-one feedback regarding individual achievement.				
31	I adapt assessment procedures as needed to ensure success (oral test, open book test, shortened test, more time for completion).				
32	I am comfortable employing individual criteria for student assessment.				
33	I present material to a variety of learning modalities within the classroom (auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, tactile).				
34	I am comfortable collaborating with support personnel.				
35	I am comfortable with support services provided in my classroom.				



		I have arrived!	I am working on this	I do not believe this is possible	I am not prepared to deal with this
36	I am able to share gifts, talents and needs of my students with colleagues.				
37	I see the job description of "teacher" as one who facilitates learning for children of all learning abilities.				
38	I embrace the philosophy that each child is important and worthwhile, demonstrating fulfilment of individual responsibilities while supporting one another.				
39	I believe that all children belong and are capable of learning in the main stream of school and community.				
40	I value all children and their contributions to society.				

## **Appendix H**

### **Interview Schedules for Professionals in Administration**

The aim of these interviews is to assess the management's views and beliefs about the inclusion of students with individual educational needs within the school environment. To assess attitudes the following will be investigated:

- How does the school mission reflect an acceptance and nurture the learning of all students?
- What is your policy on inclusive education?
- Why did you decide to embrace inclusion?
- Do you feel you should have separate policies for students with individual educational needs?
- How are new students and their families helped to feel welcome in the school?
- Do you feel there is a partnership between staff and parents/carers?
- How are parents/carers given the opportunity to be actively involved in the school and in the decisions taken?
- How do you accommodate student differences?
- In what ways are you a "student-centred" school?
- What evaluative measures are used to judge the performance and progress of both students and teachers?
- How does the structure of the day encourage collaboration?
- To what extent are students engaged and supported?

## **Appendix I**

### Discussion Guidelines for Focus Groups with Teacher-Facilitator Teams

The aim of the focus groups is to explore how the teacher-facilitator teams are supporting the learning of a diverse population of students and its implications. The following will be addressed in the group discussions:

- What are the difficulties you encounter working together to support the learning of all students in your class?
- What teaching strategies do you use to suit the subject, the size of the group and the students' understanding?
- What do you feel is the level of participation of student/students with individual educational needs?
- To what extent do you involve the students in group work?
- What evaluative measures are in place?
- What kind of extra work does including students with individual educational needs in the class entail?
- What effect do students with individual educational needs have on the rest of the class?
- What extent do you encourage the involvement of parents/carers in their child's learning?
- What supports are in place towards your own development?

## Appendix J

### Observational Checklist

*To be filled in by researcher*

1. Is the student in his own class/form area?

Yes

☐

No

☐

If not, Where is the student? And why?

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2. Is 'Student With Individual Educational Needs' (here after, SWIEN) playing with peers?

Yes

☐

No

☐

If not, is SWIEN alone? Who else is SWIEN with?

If SWIEN is playing with peers, is this Facilitated?

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3. Does the SWIEN have a way to communicate with peers?

Yes

☐

No

☐

If not, Why? Do peers know who to communicate with SWIEN?

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4. Does the SWIEN have the same 'accessories' as peers?

(e.g. trump cards, marbles, playing balls, etc.)

Yes ☐

No ☐

If not, do you think that this is the reason that the SWIEN is not playing with peers?

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5. Does the SWIEN greet others in a manner similar to that of his peers?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If not, in what way does SWIEN greet his peers?

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6. Are peers accepting SWIEN in their group?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If not, why?

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7. Is SWIEN following the rules?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If not, Why?

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8. Does SWIEN share with others?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If not, why not?

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8. How often are students with and without IEN, interacting with each other?

All the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Never ☐

9. How long does each interaction last?

20 + mins ☐ 15 to 10 mins ☐ 10 to 5 mins ☐ less than 5 mins ☐

10. What is the nature of the interaction

spontaneous ☐ assistive ☐ reciprocal ☐ instructual ☐  
disciplinary ☐ attention-seeking ☐ playful ☐ other ☐

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Who is initiating and ending the interaction?

SWIEN ☐ Peers ☐ Other ☐

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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12. What is the outcome of the interaction?

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13. Is there inappropriate behaviour directed towards SWIEN?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If so, what type of behaviour is being displayed?

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14. Is SWIEN being supervised by teacher/facilitator? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, why?

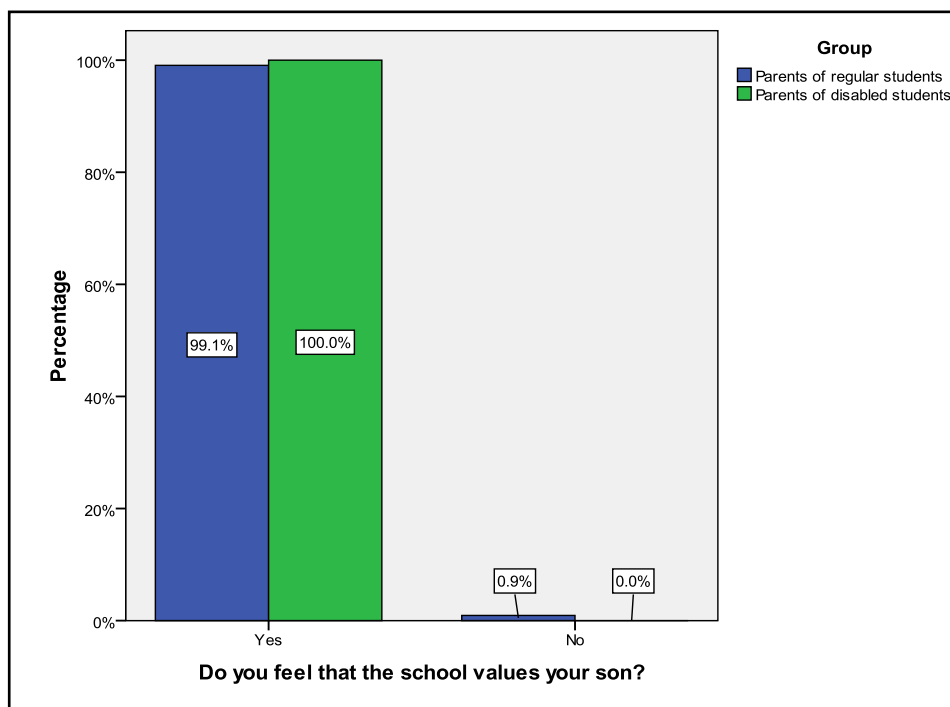
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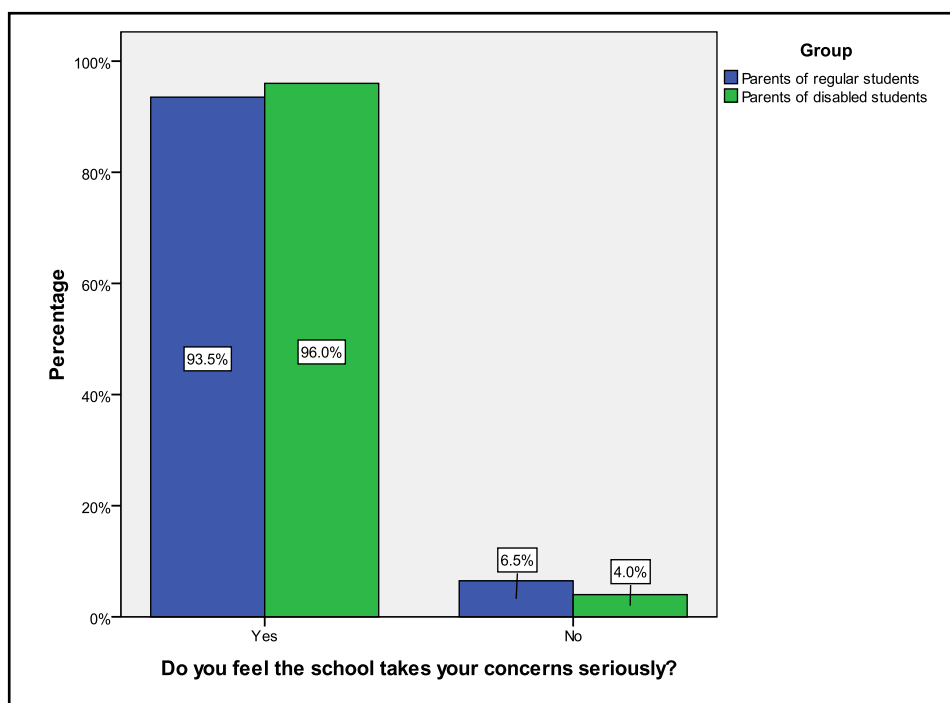
## Appendix K

### Graphs for tables in the research



#### Bar Graph for Table 3

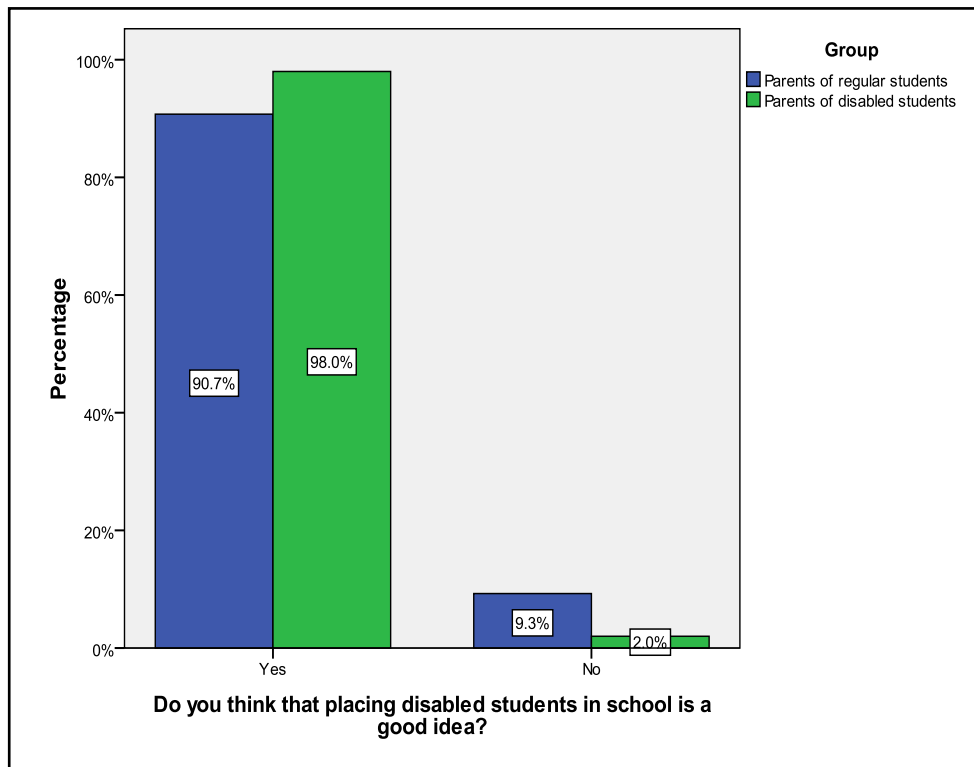
Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents of regular/disabled students by their perception of how the school values their son



#### Bar Graph for Table 4

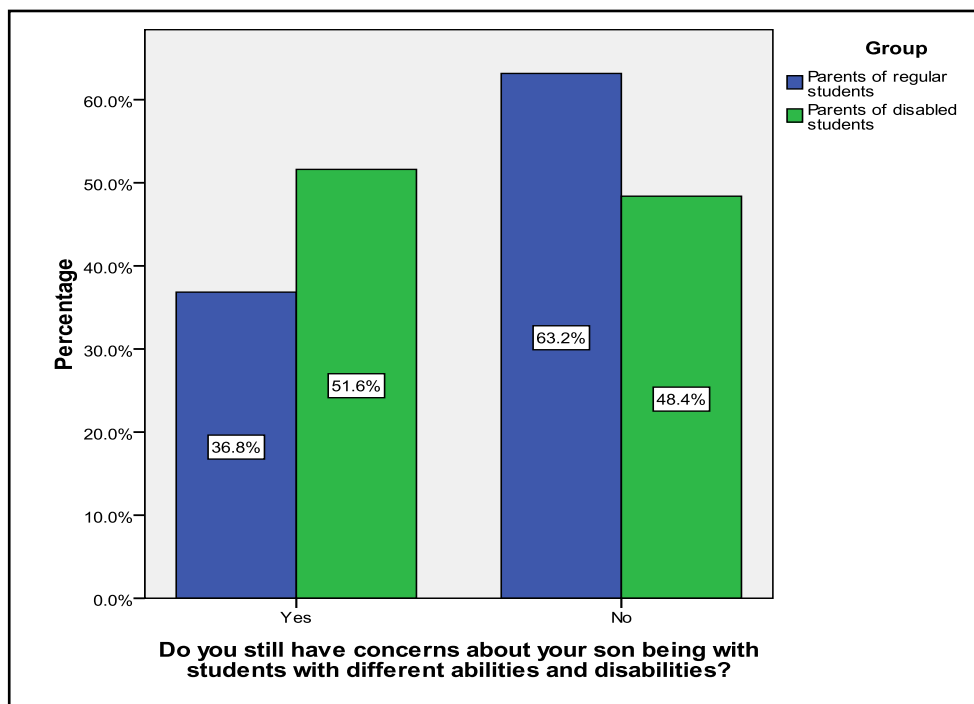
Clustered bar displaying percentages of parents of regular/disabled students by how they feel the school responds to their concerns





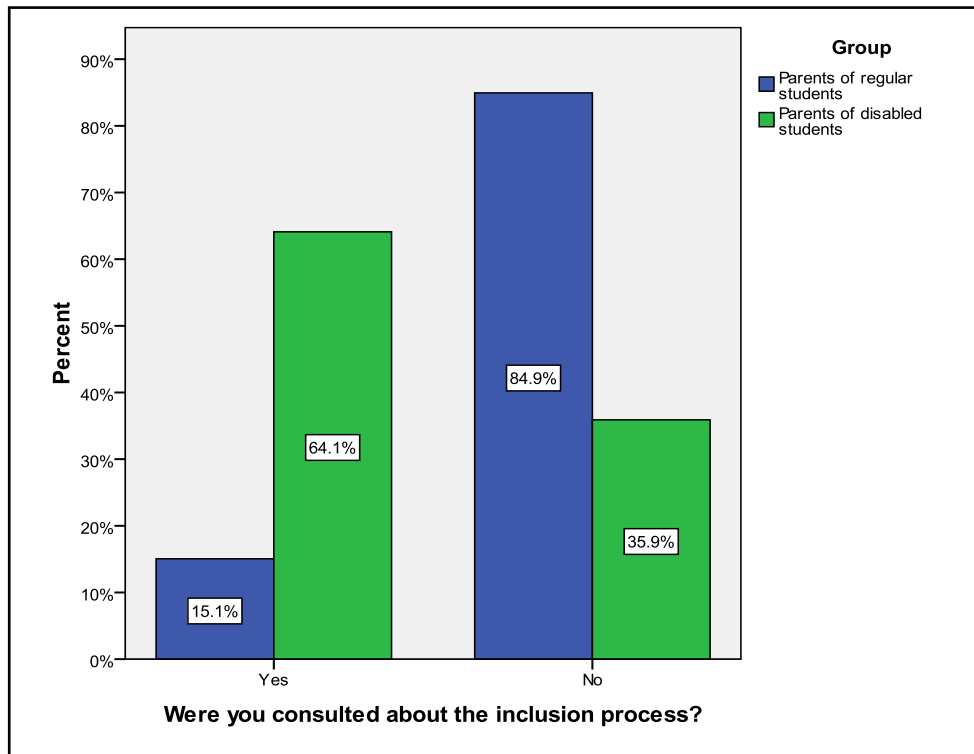
**Bar Graph for Table 5**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents of regular/disabled students by their perception of it is right for disabled students to be included in the school



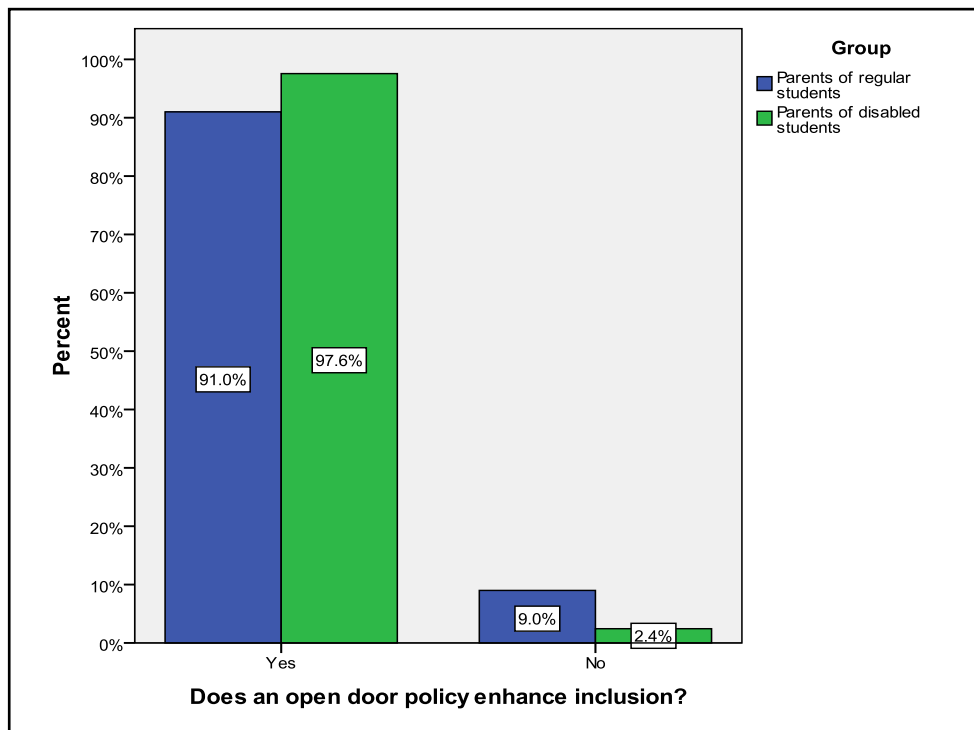
**Bar Graph for Table 6**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents of regular/disabled students by their concerns regarding mixed ability classes



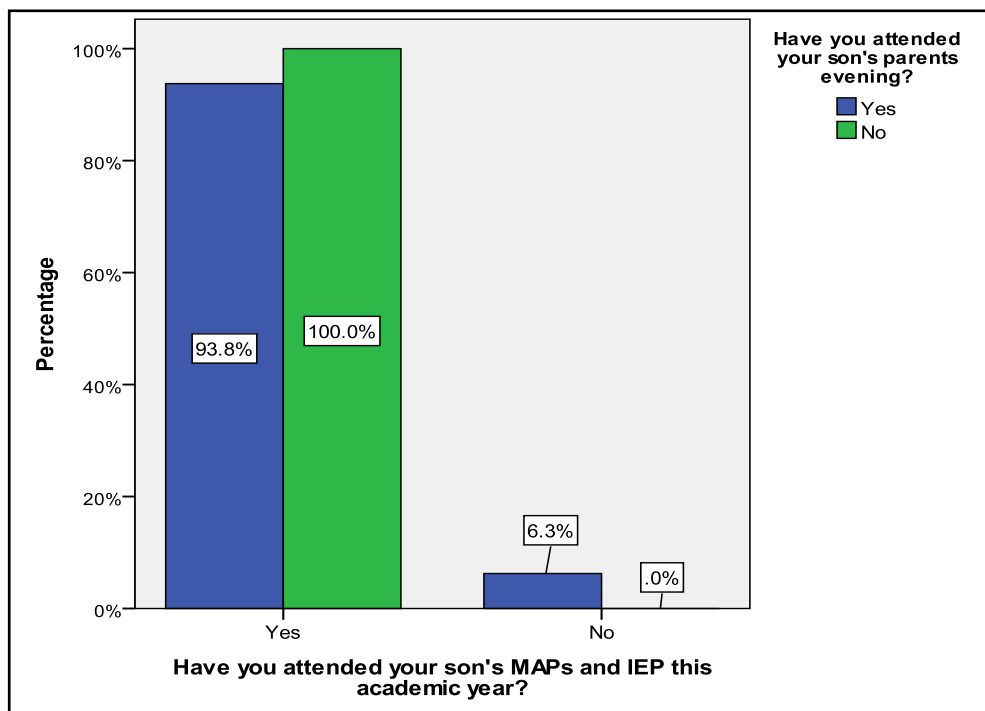
**Bar Graph for Table 7**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents of regular/disabled students by whether they were consulted about the inclusion process



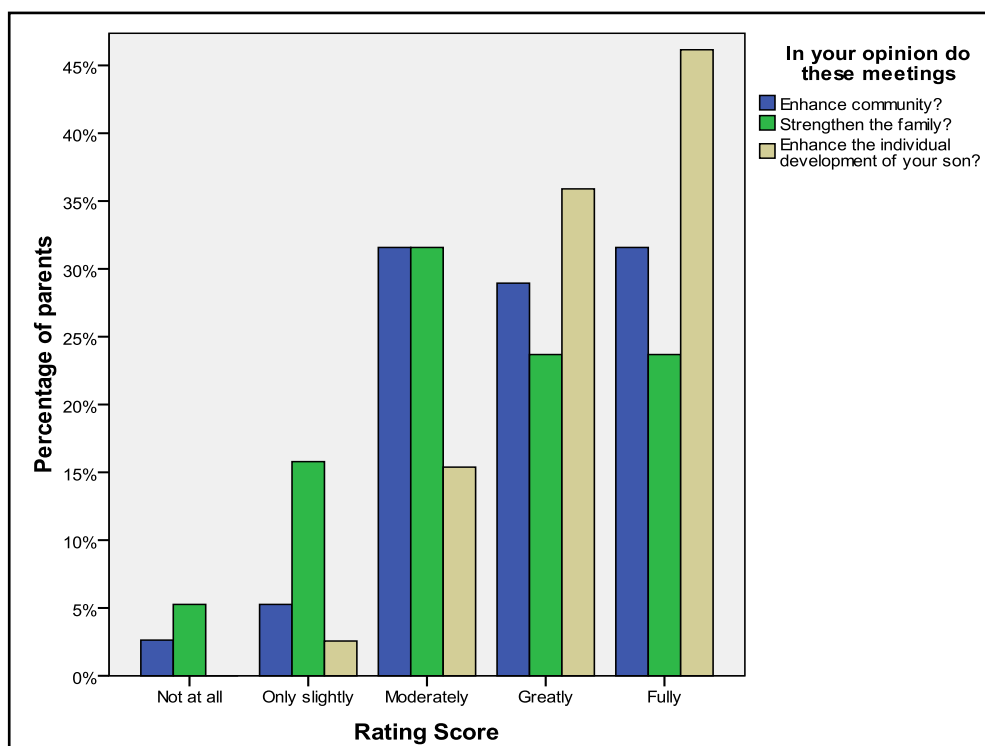
**Bar Graph for Table 8**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents of regular/disabled students by their perception of whether an open door policy enhances inclusion



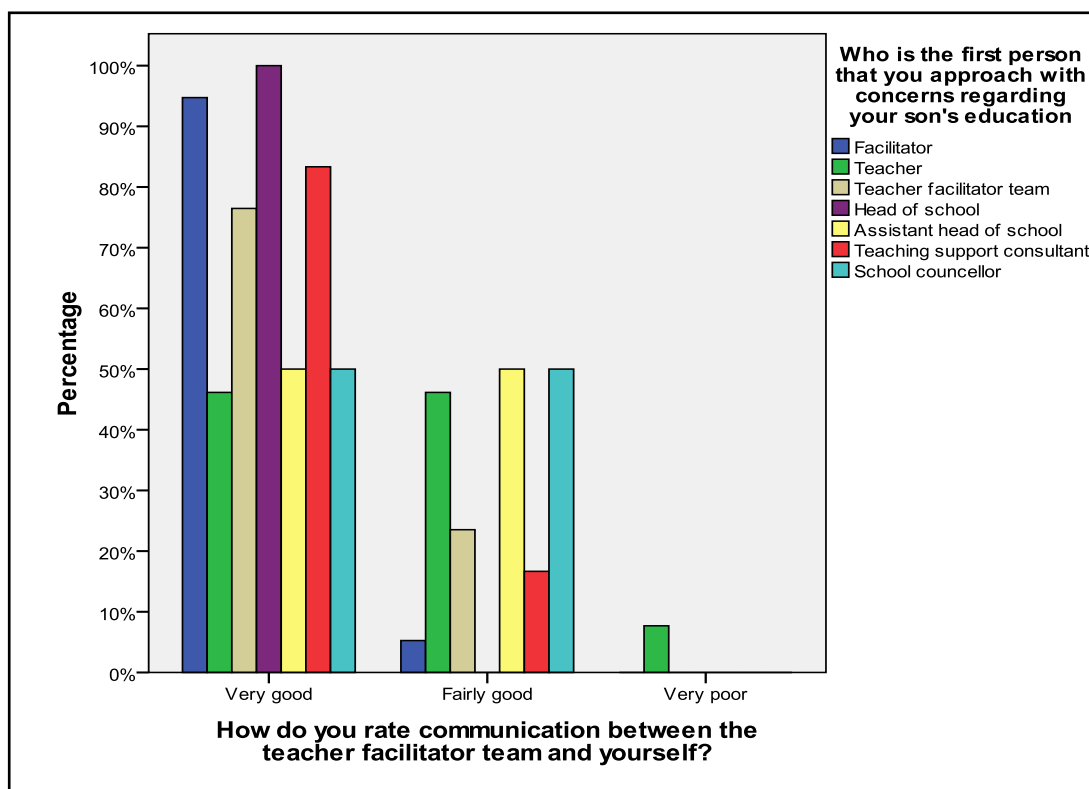
**Bar Graph for Table 9**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents of regular/disabled students by whether they attended their son's parent's evening



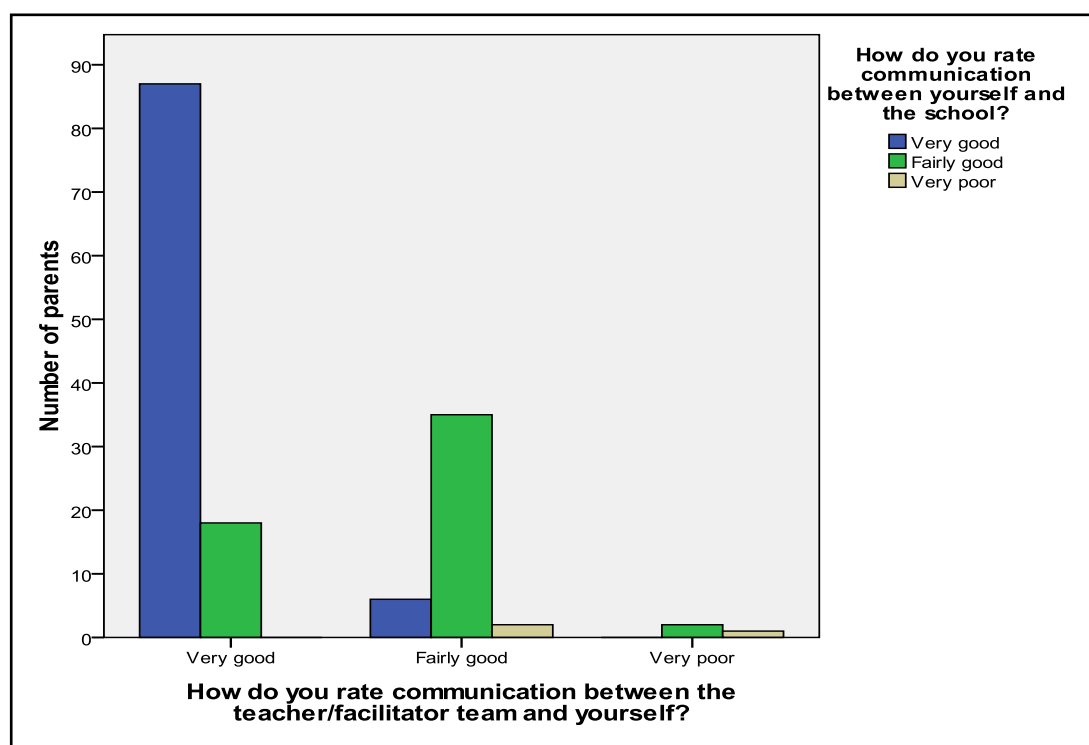
**Bar Graph for Table 10**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentage of parents of disabled students categorized by rating score of the value of the meetings



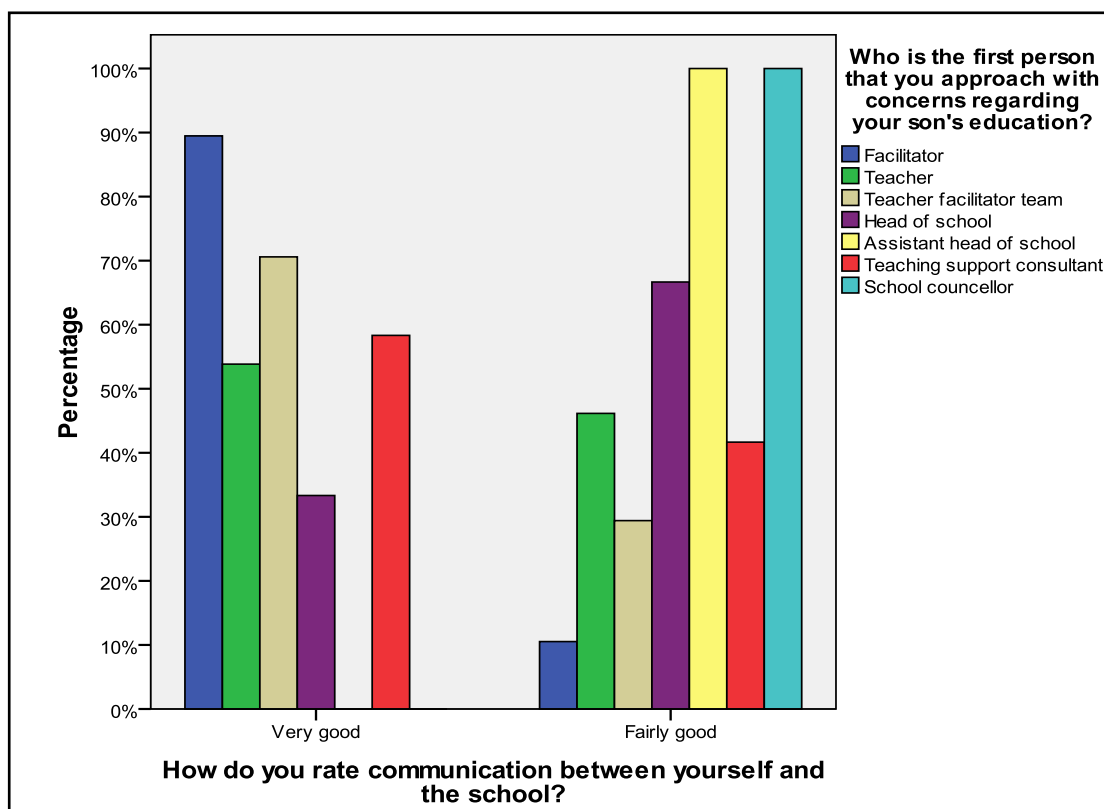
**Bar Graph for Table 11**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of interviewees by their perception of the quality of communication between teacher facilitator team and themselves



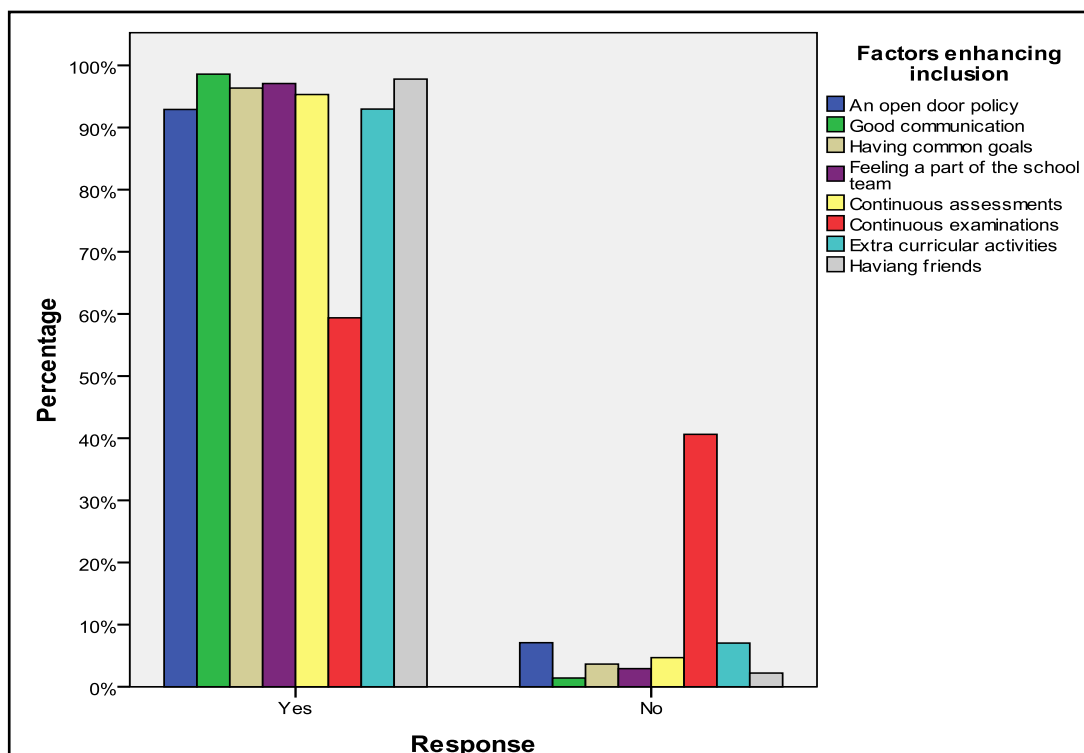
**Bar Graph for table 12**

Clustered bar graph showing percentages of parents of students by their perception of the quality of communication between teacher/facilitator and themselves



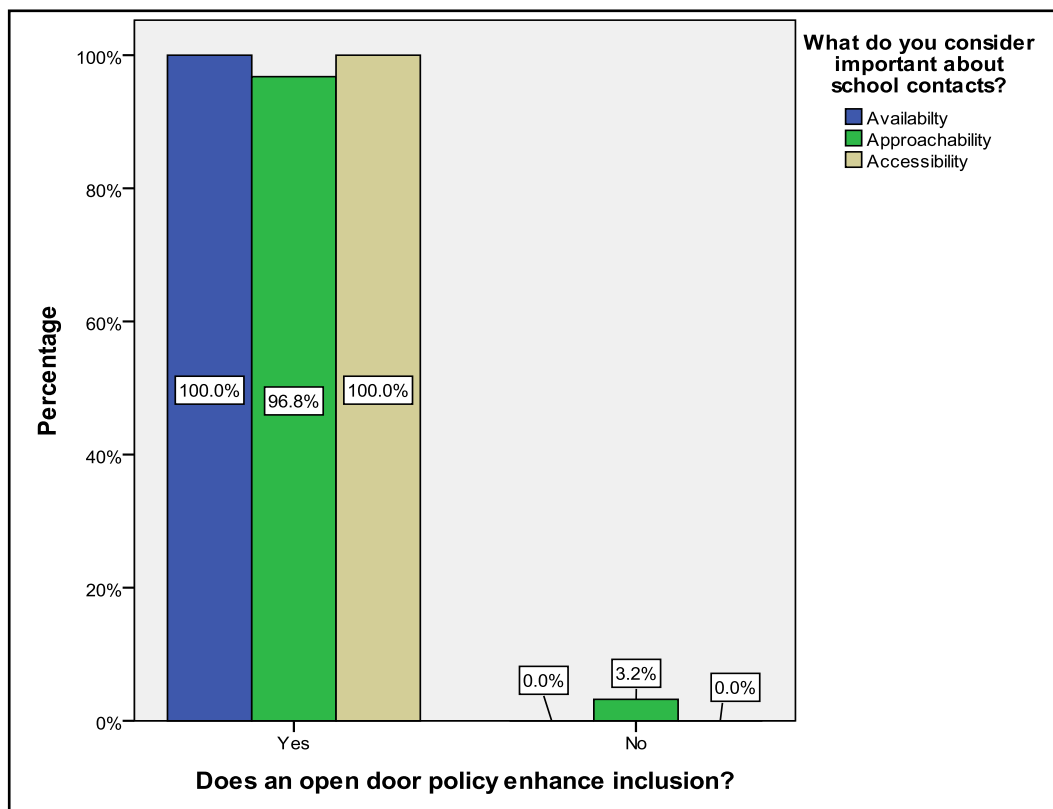
**Bar Graph for Table 13**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents by their perception of who they first approach with concerns regarding their son's education



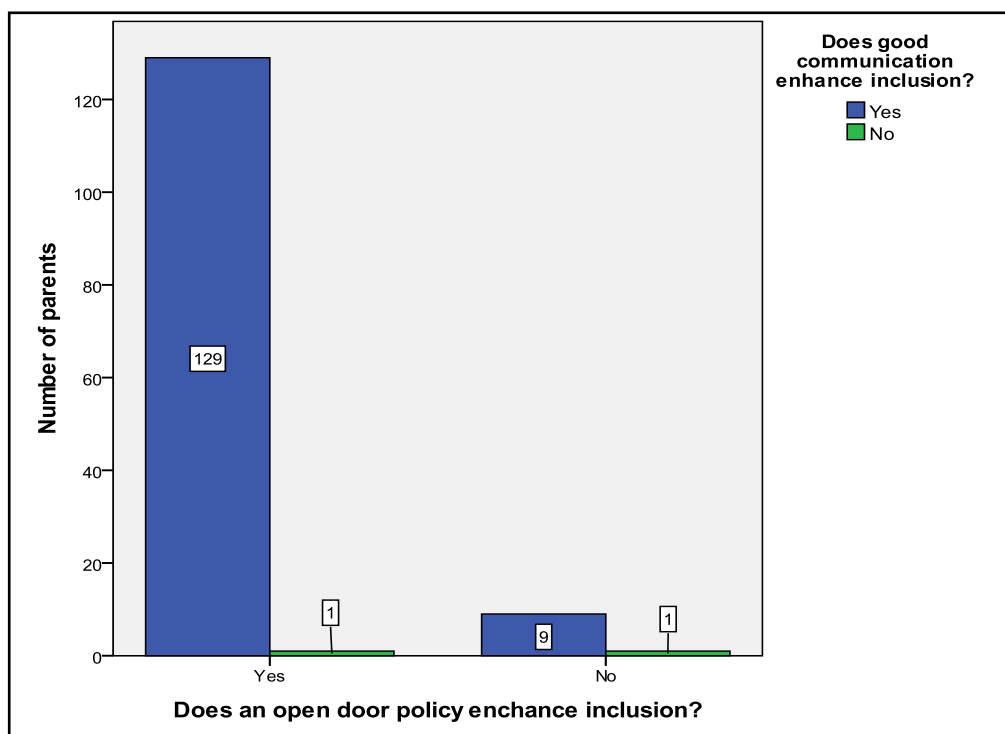
**Bar Graph for Table 14**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents of regular/disabled students by their perception of factors that enhance inclusion



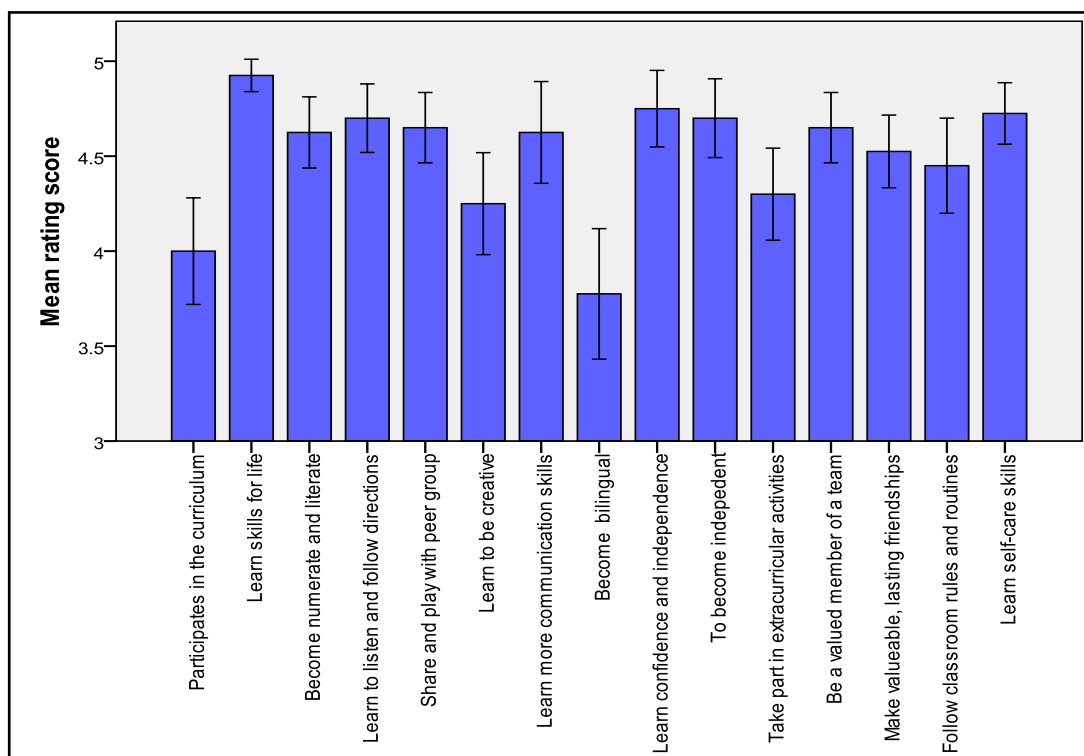
**Bar Graph for Table 15**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents of disabled students by their perception of what is considered important about school contacts



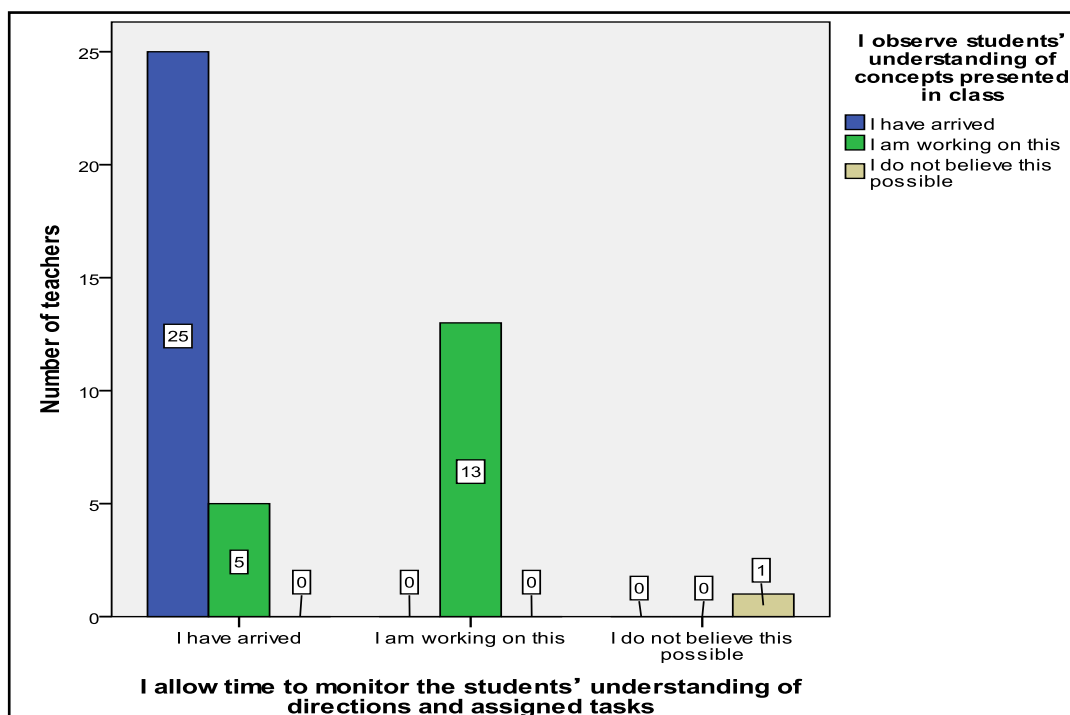
**Bar Graph for Table 16**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of parents of regular/disabled students by their perception of whether good communication enhances inclusion



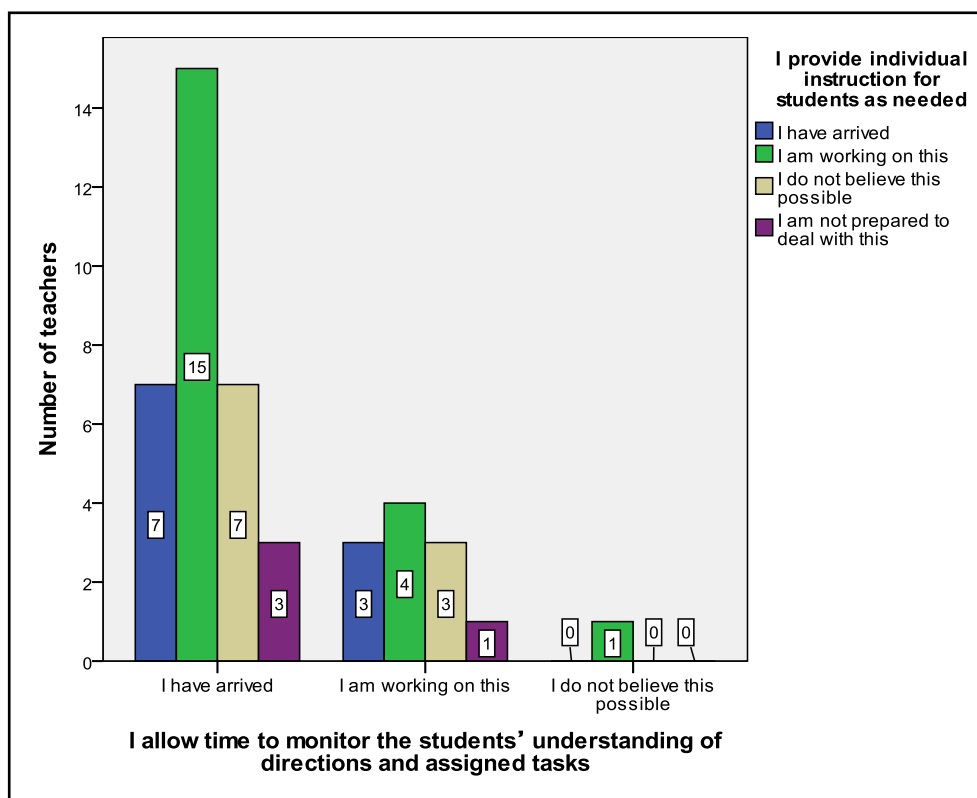
**Bar Graph for Table 17**

Error bar graph displaying the mean rating scores and 95% confidence intervals provided by parents for skills that they perceive important for their son to learn at school



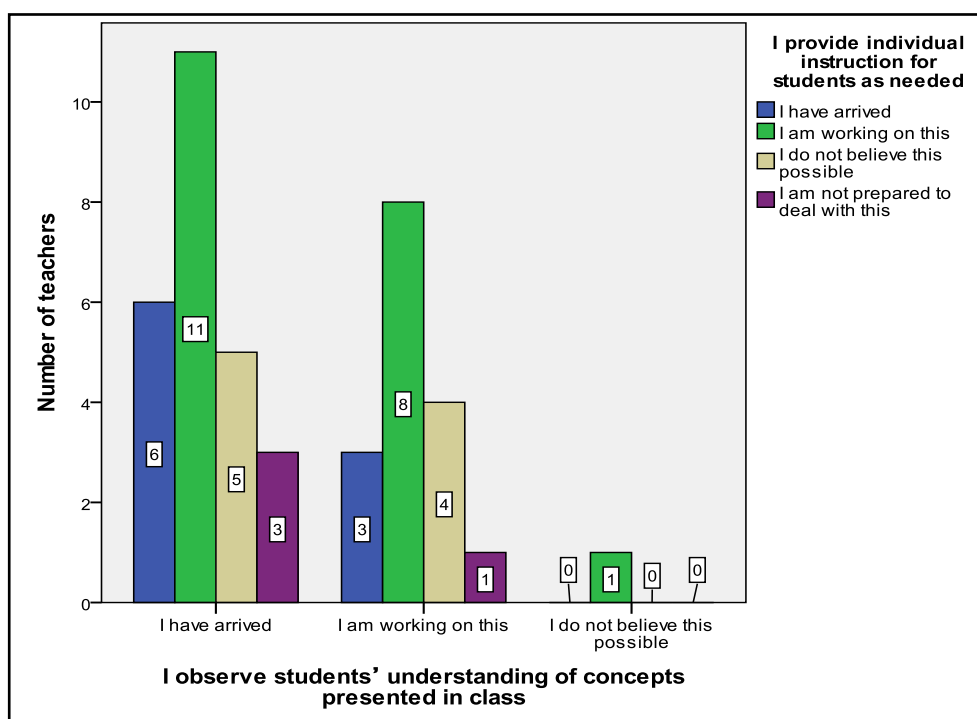
**Figure for Table 18**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of teachers by their perception of whether they observe students' understanding of concepts by their monitoring of students' understanding of directions and assigned tasks



**Bar Graph for Table 19**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of teachers by their perception of whether they provide individual instruction for students as needed



**Bar Graph for Table 20**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of teachers' provision of individual instruction by their observation of their students' understanding of taught concepts



## Students' Output

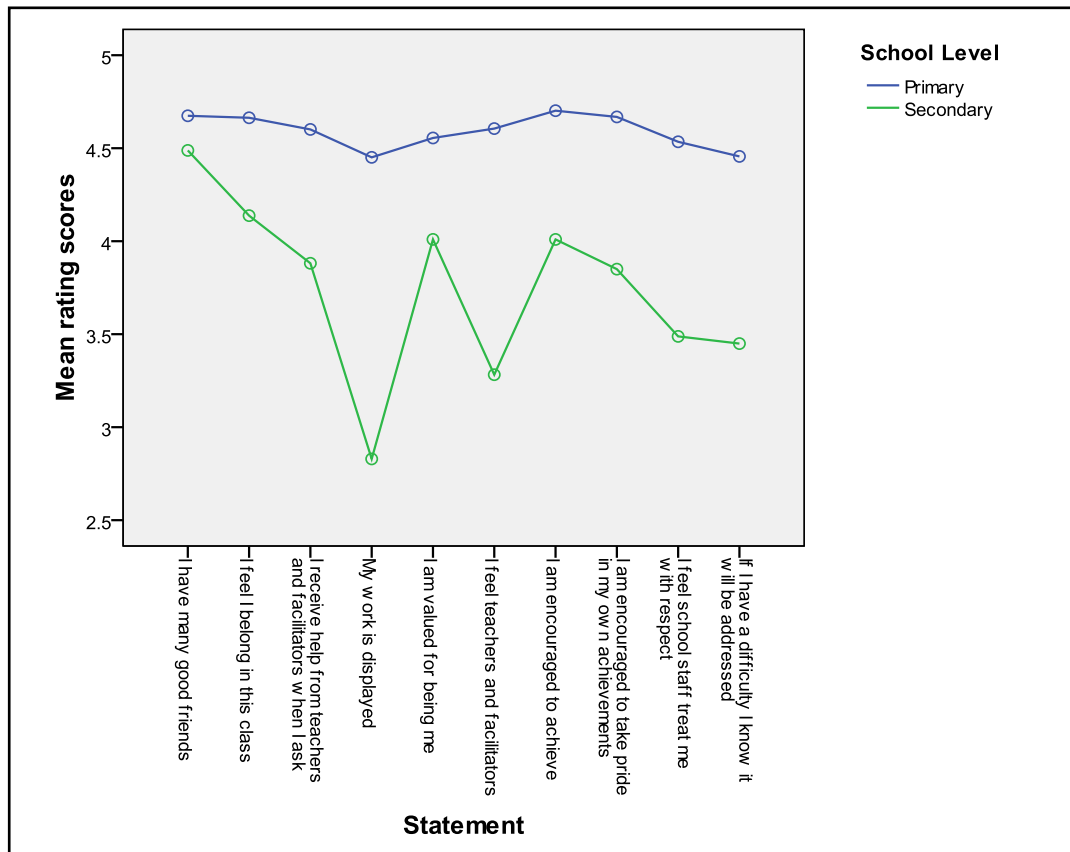
Statistics for Table 22 & 23 displaying the percentages of Primary / Secondary school children by their perception of themselves, their engagement and participation in school

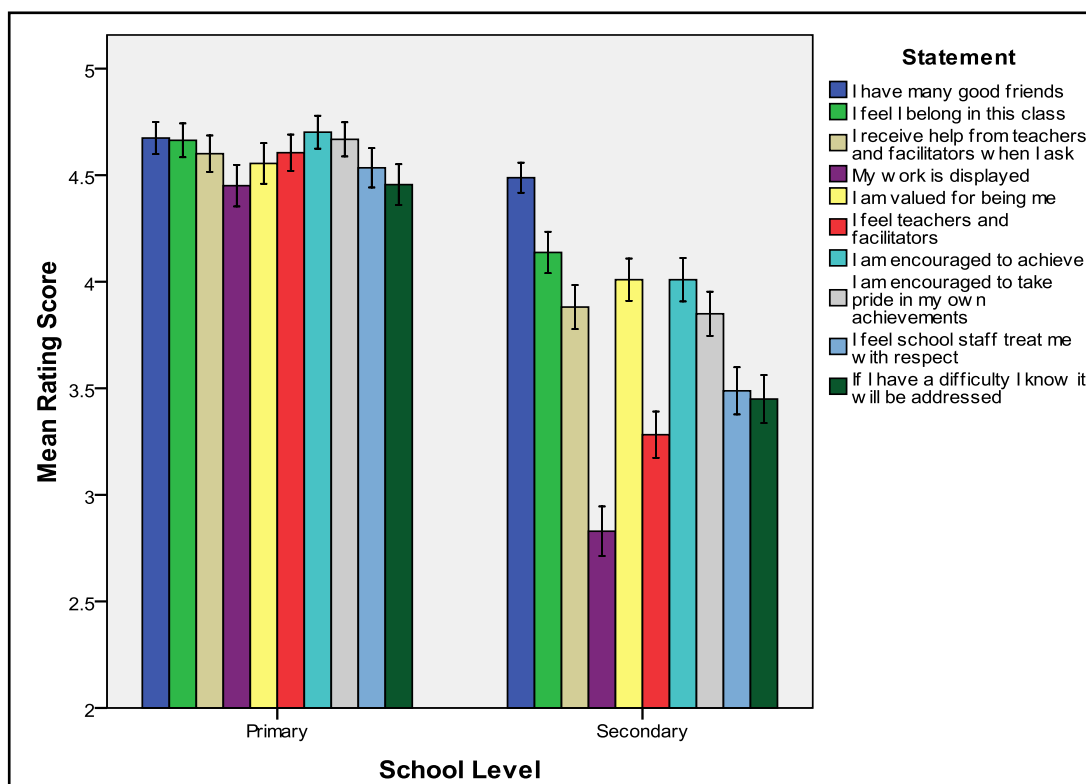
**Descriptive Statistics Table**

School Level	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sample size
Primary	I have many good friends	4.67	.799	436
	I feel I belong in this class	4.66	.842	434
	I receive help from teachers and facilitators when I ask	4.60	.908	436
	My work is displayed	4.45	1.036	437
	I am valued for being me	4.56	1.012	436
	I feel teachers and facilitators	4.61	.905	436
	I am encouraged to achieve	4.70	.821	436
	I am encouraged to take pride in my own achievements	4.67	.849	434
	I feel school staff treat me with respect	4.53	.978	434
	If I have a difficulty I know it will be addressed	4.46	1.009	430
Secondary	I have many good friends	4.49	.738	422
	I feel I belong in this class	4.14	1.015	422
	I receive help from teachers and facilitators when I ask	3.88	1.078	421
	My work is displayed	2.83	1.215	422
	I am valued for being me	4.01	1.030	416
	I feel teachers and facilitators	3.28	1.130	418
	I am encouraged to achieve	4.01	1.058	417
	I am encouraged to take pride in my own achievements	3.85	1.080	419
	I feel school staff treat me with respect	3.49	1.157	422
	If I have a difficulty I know it will be addressed	3.45	1.169	416

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
SchoolLevel	1537.480	1	1537.480	1541.987	.000
Statement	587.934	9	65.326	65.518	.000
Error	8499.083	8524	.997		





**Bar Graph for Table 22 & Table 23**

Clustered bar graph displaying percentages of students and their feelings in school

## Appendix L

### Focus Groups

Focus Group 1			
	Name	Qualifications	Teaching Experience
Participant 1	Senior School LSA	• Diploma in Inclusive Education	• 8 years LSA (Religion)
Participant 2	Senior School LSA	• Diploma in Inclusive Education	• 8 Years LSA (English)
Participant 3	Senior School LSA	• Diploma in Inclusive Education	• 8 Years LSA (Maltese)
Participant 4	Physics Teacher	• MA Education Studies	• 20 years Physics teacher
Participant 5	Maltese Teacher	• B Ed (Hons)	• 12 years Assistant Head
Participant 6	Physics Teacher	• B. Ed (Hons) Physics and chemistry	• 9 years Maltese Teacher
		• MA Spiritual Companionship	• 9 Years Physics Teacher
Participant 7	ICT teacher	• BA Communications	• 10 years Computer Science Teacher
		• PGCE	
Participant 8	Maths Teacher	• B. Ed (Hons) Maths Secondary	• 15 years Maths Teacher
Participant 9	Physics Teacher	• B.Sc. Tech	• 16 years Physics Teacher
		• PGCE Science	• Currently Head of Dept for Science in Church Schools
Participant 10	English Teacher	• BA English & Maltese	• 20 years English Teacher
Participant 11	English Teacher	• BA Psych & English	• 15 years English Teacher
		• PGCE PSD	

Focus Group 2			
	Name	Qualifications	Teaching Experience
Participant 1	Senior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diploma in Inclusive Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11 years LSA (currently Maltese LSA)</li> </ul>
Participant 2	Senior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diploma in Inclusive Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8 years LSA (Religion &amp; English)</li> </ul>
Participant 3	Senior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diploma in Inclusive Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 years LSA ( Maths)</li> </ul>
Participant 4	Senior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BA Psych</li> <li>Currently reading for Masters in Inclusive Education &amp; special needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 years LSA at SMC</li> </ul>
Participant 5	Maltese & French Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BA French &amp; Theatre Studies</li> <li>PG Dip Drama Therapy</li> <li>MA Theatre Studies</li> <li>PG Cert Spirituality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Years Drama Teacher Junior School</li> <li>3 Years Class teacher (Junior School)</li> <li>2 Years Maltese teacher Junior School</li> <li>4 Years Maltese, Drama, English &amp; French Teacher Senior School</li> <li>1 Year Assistant Head</li> </ul>
Participant 6	Biology Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B.Ed Biology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biology Teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 7	English Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BA English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15 years English &amp; History Teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 8	Accounts Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B.A Commerce</li> <li>PGCE Business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maths &amp; Accounts Teacher</li> </ul>

Focus Group 3			
	Name	Qualifications	Teaching Experience
Participant 1	English Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.Ed (Hons) English</li> <li>• Diploma in Psychology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12 Years Subject teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 2	English Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA (Hons)</li> <li>• PGCE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30yrs as class teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 3	Maths Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BSc Maths &amp; Physics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 years subject teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 4	Senior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B Psych</li> <li>• Diploma in Inclusive Education</li> <li>• Currently reading for Masters in Inclusive Education (ADHD)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12 LSA Years</li> </ul>
Participant 5	Maltese Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA (Hons) Maltese</li> <li>• PGCE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 years subject teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 6	Senior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diploma in Inclusive Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 LSA years</li> </ul>
Participant 7	Senior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA Psychology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years LSA (English)</li> </ul>
Participant 8	Senior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diploma in Inclusive Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 years LSA (Maltese)</li> </ul>
Participant 9	Italian Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B. Ed (Hons)</li> <li>• MA Italian</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 years Italian Teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 10	Maths Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B. Ed (Hons) Maths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years Maths Teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 11	French Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A. French</li> <li>• PGCE English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years French &amp; Social Studies Teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 12	Senior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diploma in Inclusive Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 Years LSA</li> </ul>

Focus Group 4			
	Name	Qualifications	Teaching Experience
Participant 1	Class Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B.Ed (Hons) Primary Early Years</li> <li>A New Way of Teaching Religion (In-service Training)</li> <li>Writing Process Seminar (Malta Writing Programme)</li> <li>An Introductory Course in Lasallian Studies focusing on teaching as a ministry; identifying teacher/student strengths and weaknesses (De La Salle Brothers)</li> <li>Toolbox for Teaching Challenging Students (Shift)</li> <li>Toolbox for Teaching Family and Individual Concerns (Shift)</li> <li>Core Competencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2007 to date – Class Teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 2	Junior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B.A (Hons) Social Work</li> <li>Certificate in Education for Learning Support Facilitator</li> <li>First Aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1999 - 2002 – Learning Support Assistant</li> <li>2005 to date – Learning Support Assistant</li> </ul>
Participant 3	Junior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intermediate Diploma Level 3 in good practice in child care and education</li> <li>Supporting students with IEN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2005-2007 - Child Carer</li> <li>2007 to date – Learning Support Assistant</li> </ul>
Participant 4	Junior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diploma in Inclusive Education</li> <li>Certificate in Key Word Signing</li> <li>First Aid</li> <li>In-service Course on Child Abuse: Awareness, Intervention &amp; Policy Procedures</li> <li>In-service Course on Supporting Pupils with IEN</li> <li>TEFL Induction course</li> <li>Facilitator's Induction Course (Equal Partners)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2003 to date LSA</li> </ul>
Participant 5	Junior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diploma in Inclusive Education</li> <li>Facilitator's Induction Course (Equal Partners)</li> <li>ECDL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2005-2007 LSA in private school</li> <li>2007 to date LSA</li> </ul>

Focus Group 4 Continued			
Participant 6	Class Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.Ed (Hons)</li> <li>• TEFL Induction Course</li> <li>• In-service Course on Differentiation</li> <li>• In-service course on Helping Children with SEN(Dyslexia)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2002-2005 English Teacher to foreign students in Summer</li> <li>• 2006-2007 Summer School teacher</li> <li>• 2004 to date Grade 5 Class Teacher</li> <li>• 15 years teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 7	Class Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.Ed. (Hons)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Support Assistant since September 2005.</li> <li>• full-time learning support assistant in February 2003, where I worked in both junior and senior schools. (2.5 Years)</li> <li>• Education Division as a full-time learning support assistant at Boys Secondary School from October 2000 till January 2003.</li> <li>• Teacher of English to International foreign students during summers 2001 - 2008.</li> <li>• Kindergarten Assistant during summer 2000 being responsible of a class of 23 children.</li> </ul>
Participant 8	Junior School LSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diploma in Individual Educational Needs – Nov 2004.</li> <li>• Pre-Tertiary Certificate for "Learning Support Facilitators" Nov 2001.</li> <li>• Level 3 diploma in Child Psychology accredited by ASET</li> <li>• European Institute of Education</li> <li>• Pre-School Education Certificate – Distinction – Aug 2000.</li> <li>• I have followed a TEFL course held at GEOS Language Centre in 2002.</li> <li>• 2 A Levels</li> <li>• 4 Intermediate Levels</li> <li>• 8 O Levels</li> </ul>	
Participant 9	Class teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B. Ed (Hons)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 years Subject Teacher</li> <li>• 9 years Class Teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 10	Class teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B. Ed (Hons)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 years Teacher</li> </ul>
Participant 11	Subject Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA Hons Maltese</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 31 teacher</li> <li>• 10 years Assistant Head</li> </ul>



## Appendix M

### Excerpts of Interview with Head of Senior School

Interviewer: How does the school mission reflect the acceptance and nurture of learning of all students in your opinion?

Head: How does the school mission ...

Yes well ... when we're saying the poor, then it's, it all derives from there. From the poor it's literally everyone so I think the difficulty is not what's, it's not the word, the poor, it's the implementation of the poor which is, which is challenging sometimes.

Yes, and why is this, why is it challenging?

Different spectacles. The obvious is defining poor within our social context, not the poor as in ... the committees ... not the obviously African or poor of 300 years ago, but within the context of today's society and then not as arriving at s... that they are poor, but actually targeting their needs.

Interviewer: Yes

Head: Which could be or which are very very very widespread so that's, there's a compromise that has to be achieved on an item by item, on a child by child or on a programme by programme basis. That is ...

Interviewer: And do you think we're doing this?

Head: It depends, I ... on at on I ever tend to say yes, yes ... a big yes. Emm ... but then when you're ... when I'm talking to myself I know it's a, you're always seeing the gaps and the lacunas which are not being covered and the more you look at it, the more you notice that. There's so much much more to do.

Interviewer: And can you mention some of those gaps?

Head: One specifically is the, the diversity of different programmes and approaches and the way they can or are being combined together to offer it a better choice to a better ... maybe it's a funny word to use but a better product to the child ... do you understand, to give him more food for his needs, so that's one thing. Then obvious things like a silly thing like a lift, or a lifter or a toilet or whatever ... or a ??

Interviewer: So then you're talking about accessibility, because this is a very old building ...

Head: But accessibility, but accessibility as physical accessibility but there's also a difficulty with accessibility at a at an emotional and at a ... even in some ways at an academic level.

Yes

Head: As they are different, the solution, obviously because they are two different students will probably be a little bit different but I would not change the process because a person has a statement or has a report or doesn't have a report.

Interviewer: No, no I'm just thinking about the partnership with the parents in so much as perhaps those parents come here more often via a visit just if you take hold of MAP sessions and IEP meeting and meetings with outside professionals, would they have more access to us ?

Head: They would tend to have more slots because ehh .... because that would be inbuilt within the needs of the child. But then

Interviewer: But what do you think about it?

Head: But then that would still apply to students who do not have a statement, who do not have a report but for one reason or another having our passing through the child or the family is passing through a certain difficulty or whatever and there would probably be ... we'll be working much much closer together for a period of time until the situation improves, if it improves if not obviously we'll continue. Emm ... and that could be to a very very very extreme levels therefore it's not just accessibility to the school but even a lot sometimes too much I would tend to say accessibility to certain individuals on the staff you know at all times of the day, day or night and here I'm not referring to LSAs necessarily it means there are other ehh ... how can I put this, situations taking place where the needy person would a ... teacher

Interviewer: Yes that's right

Head: How are parents or care givers given the opportunity to be actively involved in the school and in decisions taken?

Head: They are involved with decisions at the level of the child, of their child not on ... not on a mark raw level. On a mark raw level the tendency is we would be listening to opinions here and there

Head: Yes

Head: But not part of the decision making per se per se

Interviewer: So we would listen

Head: We would listen, consider all suggestions and then proceed from there but consider suggestions not part of the decision making process itself. Emm here this is a personal thing, this could sound very very funny but I would stand up on the record for it. Emm... I think that as a .... maybe it's a personal approach, I would listen, this me, I would listen to suggestions, I would look, give allow a period of time to look around, research, discuss and refine ehh a point of view

Head: But at the end of the day the decisions in a school are taken centrally. They're not taken by consensus. Obviously decisions are taken for the good of the whole group, for the good of the individual students, for the improvement of the school, but they are taken at a central point. This means I am not in favour, I am totally against and abhorrent to a situation where a decision is taken by running a vote between all the staff. That will not happen on my watch.

Interviewer: ... so that will go to parents as well, because we're talking about parents

Head: Yes, everyone, parents, staff, whatever. Discuss, we clarify, we explore, we explore, we ... yes by all means, by all means, yes. It's very very important, we communicate, we discuss but then at the end, decisions are taken centrally.

Interviewer: And that would be your informed decision then?

Head: Yes ... in conjunction with the management team ...

Interviewer: In conjunction with the

Head: ... but yes always with the management team. But even then, even within the management team, at the end of the day, at the end of the day decisions are taken centrally so it's either at the headmaster level or at on certain things at a director level. It has to do with property or whatever.

Interviewer: So, in what ways are you a students' centred school?

Head: I think we try and managed to a certain extent that each child feels that when he comes to school there's a relationship waiting for him. That relationship could be with preferably should always involve somewhere down the line a member of staff and other students. So he's not coming to school because he has to spend five and a half hours here but he's coming here to spend time within that context of that relationship or a web of relationships and that's when I say when I say this is a family or should be a family so it is a family not just a place where I have to go for a certain number of hours. Now, derived from that, if this is a family, if there are relationships, than at the end of the day we would be addressing the needs of the individual... more.

Interviewer: Do you think that is true? Every student?

Head: Theoretically yes, theoretically yes in practice it is a goal, an utopia that we try and worked well. The more we work towards it, the more we realize that we have a lot of work to do. Let me put it this way, at home with two kids I have problems with that.

Interviewer: Really?

Head: Because you ought to do certain things as a husband and wife with two kids and there are a good number of things that you feel that you have managed not managed to do so today

Interviewer: Ahh yes

Head: I will try and do better. And tomorrow I will try and do even better than that, even though tomorrow I will realize that I have failed miserably so I'll try again. Yes yes So with 500 kids plus.

Interviewer: Ok so, what evaluative measures are used to judge the performance and progress of both students and teachers?

Head: Students, course work and some of it assessment

Interviewer: That would be for all students?

Head: At one level yes, there is an assessment vis a vis behavior, vis a vis development of certain skills but we're still very weak there. Something is being done but we're still weak there.

Teachers mainly I would tend to say the way indirectly through results with the kids, through feedback from staff, students and parents and through monitoring especially by the management of what's happening on a day to day, lesson by lesson basis.

Interviewer: To what extent, last question ... to what extent are students engaged and supported?

Head: Let me put it this way. There's an engagement at a class level from in theory all but I think in practice it is most students, most students most of the time. Some students are engaged in the sense that they build up a relationship so they build up a sense of belonging outside class and that could be through sports, through clubs and usually when that works it's closely associated with an academic improvement with an improvement in behavior, an improvement even with behavior and attitude at home so the tendency, my tendency would be I'm trying to push for engagement in the sense of relationships within any context not necessarily within the class. I think a case in point would tend to be last meeting with x.

Interviewer: Yes

Head: Therefore students involved outside that is not class non academics clubs whatever in a in some kind of role of responsibility means they are giving something, they are not just attending they're not just but doing something ... giving. We ended up with one hundred and eighty out of five hundred and whatever students. So these students were not just simply within a situation, they were within a situation, within a work of relationships and they were actually giving their time and effort. In that situation they are engaged. I would consider them to be engaged because they wouldn't be giving out of their time, personal time if they somehow we're not getting some kind of emotional, inclusion ...

Interviewer: Perhaps intrinsic reward, intrinsic

Head: Ok we could say it intrinsic definitely definitely not extrinsic  
Definitely not

Interviewer: Yes

Head: Definitely not ... and some of them are with a huge sense of commitments. Again I think the idea is layers ... layers in the same way that academically the school tries to present layers of programmes, it would also present or it presents layers of engagement at a personal, at an emotional level and that at the end of the day it's past our care.  
Yes  
Now the more you look into it and the more you improve the more you realize that you have miles and miles to go.

Interviewer: Thank you very, very much.

## Appendix N

### Excerpts of Interview with Head of Junior School

Interviewer: How does the school mission statement reflect in the acceptance and nurture the learning of all students?

Head: Well, our mission statement says mainly that it is a caring environment and that all the children are entitled to education, all the children without any exception. It also, so I mean it does nurture you know the learning of all the students as such, we've all been we always have ehh... we always keep that as a priority sort of to make certain that all the children of all levels learn at their own pace.

Interviewer: Ok

Head: I think that as long as I've been here we've put in a lot of work, not just for the students through the through the teachers and everything.

Interviewer: What is your policy on inclusive education?

Head: What is my policy on inclusive education? Inclusive education ... well, after how many years of administration, 14 years of administration I'm sure ..... I'm going to say something that you won't like but after so many years of experience when we say inclusion in a, in a school ... today I see this certain amount of well of little bit of reserves just when a school, alright education is for all but you have to make certain that all the children get all they need or the maximum they need for their needs and a school should not in my opinion take on the responsibility of children for whom she cannot provide what they need, that is my little reserve... you know.

Interviewer: Alright emm... Who would you say are the children you can't provide for? Who would these children be?

Head: ...Well, first of all you have to make certain that you've got the staff and the personnel who know exactly what to do and not expect the admin to tell them what to do. I mean inclusion, inclusion is a very difficult a very vast subject let me make it clear that I'm talking about statemented children now because we're not talking about inclusion in its wide sense.

Emm... well especially children with physical, physical needs for example and really challenging cognitive impairments ...

Interviewer: Ok

Head: ... I can see them progressing through the junior school but then they provide a very big challenge once they go they go to the secondary school to the senior school unless the structure of the whole, the whole setup of the school provides for these children. I realize that they have a right to it, but a right to something that is beneficial to these students.

Interviewer: Ok ... and that would be your reserve

Head: Yes, yes it's something that came up, you know as we worked along sometimes we say can we afford, can we provide for this particular child, his needs are so great .... you know can we actually say that we are giving him the best. I'm sure that being in a mainstream he always benefits from that just that you know psychologically that it is always a plus but does he need, does he have enough ?

Interviewer: Do you feel you should have separate policies for students with individual educational needs?

Head: Separate policies ... well, in what way I mean all the policies? All the school policies? You write a school policy for the mainstream and then a policy for the .... No only in special special cases and an all over policy of just in case this happens then the special provision can be taken but no not a policy for ...

Interviewer: No, very good.

Interviewer: How are new students in their families helped to feel welcome in the school?

Head: Well, it's second nature here so I don't know how, they just feel welcome I mean I've just seen three new students last week and one of them was emm.... you know she wasn't sure the parent whether to send him to our school or not but in that evening she called me and I said, she told me I feel stupid not to send him, you are all so caring. I'm just saying the recent thing that came ...

Interviewer: Ok

Head: ... and put my mind at rest that we are welcoming. Well, first of all we put the parents and the children first and foremost not our rights and our you know but the first person is the child and obviously his parent so as a rule as long as I were the head of school I always told the secretary the first part of the day I see the parents physically, personally not on the phone .... I think that's very important listening, listening to their expectations, listening to their complaints, listening to their ... well understanding their backgrounds so and we always had an open school policy. Well an open school policy not all the way through it doesn't mean with with some ...

Interviewer: You mean an open door policy

Head: Yes, an open door policy. Not all the way, but as long as there is respect on either side you know.

Interviewer: Ok. Do you feel that there's partnership between staff and parents?

Head: Emm ... well I think the partnership should be there, but you should, one should never take anything for granted exactly like the welcoming and ... anything, all the principles underlying a school, you can never take anything for granted. One thing is certain in a school, and that is change ... and when there is change, you cannot take anything for granted. I've always got

to be on the look out. It's like being on a boat in the middle of the sea and we're always ready you know for the storm and the wind changes and then your boat is ... and then the crew ... so change ... so you can never take anything for granted. Partnership ... well, partnership is essential in our schools, I mean eh ... all our the school, schools, they have based everything on on partnership, the educational mission is based on partnership, the founder together with the first brothers and then the brothers with the lay people and with the parents and with the teachers, it's by association so that is something in principle you have always got to work towards ehh ... a lot of teachers do work a lot in partnership with parents but partnership even when you draw a contract has its limitations. Somebody says ohhhhhh 30 % for you and 80% for me so, that's a partnership. A partnership is 50 50 I presume eh... so everybody has to work towards an ideal amount of give and take sort of thing. But as a school I think it's one of our strongest points as long as the people who are leading believe in it and want it, it will get there, it will still be there as a forte.

Interviewer: How are parents or caregivers given the opportunity to be actively involved in the school and in decisions taken? ... How are parents given the opportunity to be actively involved in the school and in decisions taken?

Head: Well, from my point of view and from, since I've been here you know as long as I have not enough

Interviewer: Not enough

Head: No not enough, it's risky accepting, listening to everybody's opinion but saying all that, despite all that, through our PTA we did have a couple of some questionnaires whenever we wanted ehh an opinion from the parents emm ... but it's difficult I think and they more

Interviewer: How do you accommodate student differences?

Head: In what way differences? Do you mean academical?

Interviewer: All yes, how do you accommodate student difference?

Head: With differentiated teaching you mean ...

Interviewer: Yes, as well

Head: Oh what a lot we've going to talk about here. It's a whole lot of work, it's well student differences so first of all, so we have already spoken about a team and a list of pupils who have been designed as list of pupils to make certain that it is a balanced, mixed ability, balanced class. By balanced I mean that I call it the load, mind you it's not a very nice word but you've got a tem and you're putting a load, you're giving a load to that team and the team has to be strong enough for that load or else suitable enough to give to provide the service for ehh ... for that class and that class it's in a non factor for that team so, who knows about that class? ... The admin. So, during the first couple of weeks, the teachers and their teams, they focus on getting to

know as much about the children as much as they can, about their abilities

Interviewer: Yes

Head: ... and by the third or fourth week, we start having class analysis which means every team meets the assistant head or the coordinator and they ask any questions they need to answer to have answered about their particular classroom. About an anomaly they've noticed with a child and the admin, the administrator gives information to this team, the information they would require to help them through to help them ehh ... teach the child. For example background information, about a child who has a difficult parent, a difficult family or they're separated in the family or maybe he's got something different in his character so they have to watch out but enough information not too much information, especially not too much information about the kind of child he was in the previous year if ... so most of the children who don't have any particular problems which say you know mains normal, nothing about him, just a normal boy. We also identify children who have literacy difficulties, so that immediately provision can take place, children with low IQ, not low IQ what do you call it emm ... with cognitive problems right? Well we have to identify ...

Interviewer: Yes

Head: ... so that we see to them, not to label them or to say oh oh look at that and only through analyzing the class then can we hope first of all to make certain that every child through every subject has the right level, the right level when the task is differentiated. When the teacher is giving the lesson, she knows heqq her target what she's going to aim at ...

Interviewer: Yes

Head: ... to which level she has to start and then to climb up. There's so much to say my God. It's so complicated, and then after doing that about apart from differentiation once she has the class analysed, we are working very hard to include group work.

Interviewer: And ok... and would you say you're being successful?

Head: ... in class literacy support, in class not out of class. There's a certain amount of out of class support being done as has always been done but added to that I believe I believe that more in class support should be done through group work.

Interviewer: Right and do you think that the group work is one way of differentiating the lesson, the actual structure of the lesson. I think you've said you've differentiated work at different levels

Head: Yes that's eh working at different levels but that is I know because I'm not talking, I'm not being structural haw ... structured properly, you've got, you've got two things. So, structuring the lesson at different levels, it's helping all the



children with different needs or different levels to access the lesson.

Interviewer: Yes

Head: Right? But I believe also that there are children whose skills are not being honed enough so that they reach eventually you know a reading, the average reading stage you know. By accessing the lesson, that is already a big step forward, being able to access the lesson at my at the child's own level, that's fine but what is causing that child, why is he at that level the child? Is it because he can't for example he can't read so well so the paper has still to be isn't there a chance of him ever getting to read unless he gets a one to one lesson of how to read. So that can only be done through group work...

Interviewer: OK

## **Appendix O**

### **Excerpts from Focus Groups**

#### **Focus Group 1**

Interviewer: What are the difficulties you encounter working together to support the learning of all students in your class?

English Subject Teacher:

Working together that is the teacher and the facilitators you are talking about.

Science Subject Teacher:

Personally I don't have enough facilitators to cover subjects.

Male English Subject LSA:

I think one of the main problems is to find time to time to speak to the teachers themselves to see what's happening what lesson is going to take place etc, etc. Many many times you just have to improvise during the lesson itself, for example, I ask them like for what is happening like if it is Tale of Two Cities for example, if it is English and then you have to stick to the notes prepared anyway and go along with that. If work is given I see if it needs to be adapted or not. It's usually there and then. It's not very easy to adapt.

Interviewer: So you're saying that you adapt after the lesson rather than before. Then the notes are ready and the adaptations are done after the lesson.

Male English Subject LSA:

Yes but certain things cannot really be adapted if they fall in the mainstream. For example English language grammar points cannot be changed so it's the same work, if they are following the mainstream curriculum

Female Maltese Subject LSA:

As regards to Maltese I have the topics beforehand and I prepare the stuff, I check them out and then I work accordingly to what's being done in the class. And you find that you have time to meet

Female Maltese Subject LSA:

No she sends me things by emails.

Female Math Subject LSA:

As regards to me my difficulties since my subjects have various teachers teaching the subjects. Maths for example this year had three different teachers and a lot of lessons clashed, I wasn't able to go in for all of the lessons so someone had to take over some of these lessons and obviously my contact time with the teacher, ..... especially, is very very limited.

Male English Subject LSA:

Same with me. I had two different teachers and lessons clashed as well and someone had to go in for my lessons as timing of the lessons clashed as well.

Female Life Skills Teacher:

Life skills no facilitators join the lessons-it might help in dangerous situations to have the support of a facilitator

Male Form 3 Coordinator:

I think it's more acute because of the number of subjects in Form 3 together with the dropping of subjects by some of the students and therefore, reduced in class support for the students remaining in class. The subjects clashing and the students.

Female PSD Teacher:

But I am afraid there is nothing much to do about that. Lessons clashing I mean.

Male Form 3 Coordinator:

No, lessons clashing no. I think that next year it will be only statemented children who will have the right to drop subjects, all other children might be exempt from exams but they will have to follow curriculum because otherwise it will become impossible.

Interviewer: Are there any teachers who would like to say something about working with facilitators

Female PSD Teacher:

I mean my main subject is life skills; obviously I don't have facilitators during those lessons.

Interviewer: Do you think you should though? Do you think it would help?

Female PSD Teacher:

For example during my last lesson on Friday yes. Because I had that incident with ..... for example. Yes as there is quite a number of boys who have problems and it would help having someone else over there.

Interviewer: And you wouldn't mind to have someone there.

Female PSD Teacher:

For that particular group you know but otherwise no, there will be no need to have anyone Actually it was the first time that happened. Because it was a dangerous situation especially, and you know it's the last lesson on Friday and everyone is tired and fed up so that doesn't help.

Female English Subject Teacher:

All I have is one class of English, I mean I had two classes last year and one this year, I worked with ..... both years and I mean we work well together. I am seeing it from your point of view. I appreciate your presence in class, we work well together we give each other feedback but it's very much as you said the talk after the lesson of your part you know.

Male English Subject LSA:

To be honest last year it was your first year as well, it was the first year for me. We worked more together because I knew you we were doing this and that and I needed to know more but this year once I knew what she was going to do you know I mean the curriculum was the same, same books, so I had the same things, same books. You know what I mean. The things are there so.

## Focus Group 2

- Interviewer: Can we go on for another question  
To what extent if any do you involve the students in group work
- Male Teacher:  
So Pair work or group work. It depends on the subjects
- Male: For practical subjects they are involved completely
- Female Form 5 Red Class Tutor/English Subject Teacher:  
In languages its not done we are pressed for time
- Male Form 5 White Class Tutor/Computer Studies Subject Teacher:  
Computer studies I did organise it sort of, it comes natural in the system Male: I had ..... who stayed with ..... is good at computers and it did work very well. Finding someone with whom they can stay and they can work with is the key.
- Male Form 5 Coordinator/ Maltese Subject Teacher:  
Because it happened that the children got on well together
- Female Form 5 Subject Teacher:  
You can't force them though. I try to give a lesson  
Because a group who were very good and a group who very bad  
But I don't want to risk - And sometimes it's not from the good ones  
He would ask am I going to stay with that nerd?
- Female Form 5 Subject Teacher:  
When it happens we have to encourage it
- Interviewer: Ok so I am going to ask another question  
What evaluative measures do you have in place?  
What?
- Interviewer: How do you evaluate the students' progress? What methods do you use?
- Male/Female Form 5 Subject Teachers:  
Exams, test, feedback during the lessons
- Female Form 5 Subject Teacher:  
I get a lot of feedback from the practical sessions as well
- Male Form 5 Maltese Subject Teacher:  
Even in class during a discussion you get a lot of feedback. Discussion, correction, everything. How interested is he
- Interviewer: Now what kind of extra work does it involve on yourselves having students with an identified disability in your classes? What extra work.
- Female Form 5 Class tutor/ Math Subject Teacher:  
If the facilitators are taking care of them?
- Interviewer: No this is not if the facilitators are there or not there. This is yourselves personally as teachers and even the LSAs, but I mean their job is because of the statemented students . This is more what does it actually involve
- Female Form 5 Class tutor/ Math Subject Teacher:

Sometimes, for example, I am doing graphs in Form 3. Poor ....., she has 3 with her. Whilst the others are working, without wanting, I went near ....., and told him, come dear let's work out this table, and he did it with me, I am still responsible for him even though he has a facilitator. That is my responsibility. It is not fair that I leave it up to her to make eye contact with them because I know that they copy slowly, and I think, I could perhaps spoil things, that is, it is not as though I couldn't careless and rub off the board because the others managed and I know that you have that problem. Definitely, we are still responsible for them.

Female: It's extra work that you kind of have to do because you have statemented children in class

Male Form 5 Subject Teacher:

I couldn't do is the Past papers are divided according to each chapter so for example if someone wants to do some extra work, and we correct them then they can do more Past papers even from Paper A or from Paper B and we correct them then but as extra work apart from the one in class

Interviewer: So you give them extra work may be

Female Form 5 Subject Teacher:

They're free to do it. For example they tell me listen how can I do something extra and I tell them why you don't work out from questions 8, 9 and 10 and then he brings them along

Female Form 5 Subject Teacher:

It is already a problem for them to do the work that I give them. I would have a problem if they do not get their homework.

Female Form 5 Subject Teacher:

I would have a problem if they copy homework because I send a note home for each homework that is missing. Everybody is getting his homework but everyone is copying his homework as well

Interviewer: Is there any extra work involved in having a student who is statemented in your class

Female Form 5 Green Class Tutor:

If they don't want to do something they are not going to do it. But I am talking about statemented students. Female: even if I do extra work I make myself available three breaks a week for the boys I want to be at that place every break Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. How many boys turn up? Did you do anything extra for .....? For ..... That's the question

Female Form 5 Green Class Tutor:

This year no.

Male: But because they've been taken care of by the LSA.

Female Form 5 Subject Teacher:

..... didn't need it. But in the lesson I carry on  
..... asks me. I write his notes. I stop and wait for him.

Interviewer: Wait a minute. Writing of notes. You do do extra things then  
Female Form 5 Subject Teacher:

But ..... doesn't need it. .... doesn't need it. I still can't  
understand why ..... was statemented

Interviewer: Because he has ADHD and that's why. And he's really  
improved and we should thank the system for that. You should  
have seen him in Form 1 and see him today. You should have  
seen him when he was 7. Sometimes we pass remarks that are  
not correct because this boy had very serious problems  
Because there was never continuity of what happened in Form  
1, 2 and 3. So we have to

### Focus Group 3

Interviewer: What we're doing is that we're doing a case study of the College; it's the result of five years work so it's the result of all our work. What's important is that we answer the questions as honestly as possible. Because it's for us to say either we've covered so far or this is not working at all. Its to do with inclusion practices and what I've done is I've prepared a set of questions but if you feel that there is something we need to add or there is something more important or pressing you can also pick that up yourself. We don't have to stick to the agenda. I made an agenda just to keep us on task.

What are the difficulties you encounter working together to support the learning of all the students in your class?

I am talking about teamwork.

Female Form 1 English subject teacher:

Mainly there are so many students who have special needs that are not statemented but sometimes need help and sometimes even more than the statemented child. I mean that's one of the main problems and of course the facilitator has so many students to look after. More than that I don't know how she can help with the rest of the class.

Interviewer: So you feel that not enough help is given to the rest of the class. Do you all agree to that?

Female Form 1 English subject teacher:

Yes. The best situation would be that there would be two teachers in the same class. Maybe we don't have enough teachers. In England that's how they work. I believe there are some schools, which work with two teachers.

Interviewer: Only in Italy. Not in England.

Female English subject facilitator:

Maybe two facilitators rather than two teachers.

Interviewer: Two facilitators plus a teacher.

Female Form 1 English subject teacher:

No two teachers and one facilitator. There is a school which works like that in Italy

Female Form 1 English/Italian subject teacher: Yes it would perfect though, one teacher explains the other one works with the students and then the facilitator works with the statemented child.

Interviewer: So two teachers, and one facilitator.

Female Form 1 English/Italian subject teacher:

In Italy though.

Interviewer: Unless we're talking of mixed age groups. In the UK there are some schools which have mixed age groups so you have two teachers but they are not present all the time they exchange.

Would you all say there is not enough help?

Focus group: Yes definitely

Interviewer: Are there any other difficulties maybe that you encounter?



Female Form 1 English subject teacher:

I find lack of time to speak to the facilitators. We have, If you look at the time- table as a teacher I hear it is going to be revised. I hear there are going to be only two lessons I don't know. My free lessons are not free because I have all the other things on

Female Math/Science subject teacher:

You have to find time because even at the weekend to communicate and we send emails to each other, we send sms to each other, we grab a moment when we walk in the corridor or – or wait for the teacher to come out of a class to ask something, during the lesson itself I try my best if there is some work assigned to talk to the facilitator and we have a word during the lesson but its working fine in my case because

Female Form 1 coordinator and Maltese subject teacher:

But there is the need that they have meetings with us, like we have meetings between ourselves, subject meeting, they have, for example, with the year tutor, with the form tutor, they would be present also for that meeting, that means they will have that lesson free where we could all meet as a whole team.

Female Form 1 English subject teacher /Librarian:

About their lack of time, the facilitator sorry. Obviously there is lack of time facilitators sorry, not this particular group, its not a Form I but a particular facilitator told me she has no time to come to the library for example, she said ...I run all the time and I have no time to come to the library. I asked this person to come and get her books checked or stamped or whatever, she said I have no time to come to the library so I imagine that what I am saying is that facilitators don't have that extra bit of time, I don't know if it's true or not whatever. But it's not a Form I, a facilitator who works with the Form I, I mean its nobody in this team but I mean since last year I've been asking this person come, your books have to be checked and have to be stamped, you know books borrowed and I am told I have no time

Female Maltese subject LSA:

Borrowed By the person or by the student being supported?

Female Form 1 English subject teacher /Librarian:

By the person. It's not the question. I am not complaining about not having her books stamped but to add on to the fact that they have no time even to come perhaps to the library if it true now or not I don't know

Female Math subject teacher:

Something I would like to add. The thing of basic skills I know that you are not part of it but when they shift from one lesson to the other, they take a lot of time, the children shifting. I mean they have to get used to it. Now one year has passed but they don't know actually how to do it. Not yet. I mean they still take 5 or 10 minutes to change from the lesson. I mean I finish the

prayer and they're still grabbing their bags etc and the teacher is still waiting outside.

Female Math facilitator:

Yes it's true they take a long time to leave the classroom

Interviewer: What if any evaluative measures are in place? How do you evaluate the disabled student's work?

Female Form 1 English/Italian subject teacher:

Don't expect too much from anyone. You are lucky if the child has understood the lesson and has produced something relevant to the lesson, whether it's a picture, it's a computer print out and he can stand up and say something about the lesson – keep it for life. What does he get out of it for life? Not for the exam. That is my, let's call it that way and time passes and I go back to the topic for example we did about jobs at the beginning of the year, they came up later in a different subject in Italian they remembered what I said in English in October and chose that information transferred into Italian and it came out I was very pleased they could write five sentences at the time no need to write two pages.

Italian first year but nothing much, so don't expect too much with special needs. I started with those kids

Evaluation for those kind of kids in class the different levels

obviously

Female Math subject teacher:

With me I still haven't studied ----- It takes too much time and you don't find help its too much

Interviewer: So do you use formative or summative assessment of both?

Female English subject teacher:

Yes I use summative. I mean there are charts, projects

Interviewer: Will you use the same subjects?

Female English subject teacher:

Yes, yes about the special needs children in the beginning we notice that there were some students who like ..... it wasn't his work, it was obviously not his work, if it were his work he wouldn't be needing help you know and we phoned Since he moved the class, it is the same but maybe it is....

I had told ..... we had discussed it, its better if, we have to see what he is capable of doing and not whoever is helping him at home can do you know because his score was really high and then there are others who you notice its not their work like ..... you know he obviously gets a lot of help which is good if he gets help but we have to know what he is and what it is.

Interviewer: Yes it's important to know. Ok. Now I am going to ask you what kind of extra work it involves including disabled students in your class

Female English subject teacher:

Its not extra work not on us no it's a different work sort of but not extra

Interviewer: You don't see it as extra work?

Female Math subject teacher:

Not extra work its repetition

It's different especially Maths but not like extra a part of your work, the same lesson - It's the way you include them as well

Interviewer: What effect do you think students with individual educational needs have on the rest of the class?

Female Math subject teacher:

There is a bit of disruption sometimes you know but they are not the only ones who disrupt you have students who you have to keep on drawing their attention to the lesson you know like pay attention, stop talking, they are not out of the ordinary in the sense of disruption I mean because most of the time they are working close to the facilitator they don't give trouble at all although I wouldn't call it disruption, the effect perhaps would be keeping perhaps the class moving more slowly because there are some children not many but there are some children like, ....., ..... that you can really extend, you can't because you have to go much more slowly in that sense not disruption though no But sometimes it works against you for example in One red, since they are a group at the back they become disrupted if for example I take him out of that group and put him in front of me then the lesson continues smoothly.

I am talking about ..... because ..... his voice even is loud when he talks. Not just his voice, he doesn't stop talking But once he followed the lesson stayed quite but he wants to have something to do during the lesson, it was perfect when he is in a group he can't

That's what I notice He likes to show off but again

But again he is the only one who talks and who performs in class

But again this is something that one has to

Interviewer: It's not always a good strategy to put all the students who are needy altogether. What are your views?

Female Social Studies LSA:

For the facilitator it's hard to have them altogether, putting all the difficult students together

Female Maltese Subject LSA:

Because of ..... because in other classes we don't work like that we do not just sit its also because the four of them have different abilities ..... takes something, yes and Isaac and the other one and ..... they take some things, therefore you have a lot of different work to look at, at the same time

You are looking at three different thing sat the same time you know apart from the lesson so that makes four for the facilitator because ..... and ..... are doing something ..... and .....I they are doing something together and the lesson going on so those are three things going on at the same time

Interviewer: How do you cope with the three things

Female Maltese LSA:

And the three things that's why I told you first because just now I told him to go down with his boys a little bit because I silenced him twice during the lesson it's very difficult with ..... in class I mean when he is in class its always like that I mean even the others look at him and he tries to If it's ..... I don't realise its ..... probably ..... is another one a very demanding boy We are bombarded from both sides all the time during the lesson. True or not? If one draws attention to ..... then the other one is crying out I notice that..... wants to have the attention all the time but Daniel is very persistent as well Then you are not going to give five minutes of attention to ..... and not to ..... I don't stand a chance If you are giving ..... attention I have to have my time now He does try you need to have every task in hand or you have to see it before .He demands a lot And the reds and the whites. That maybe differently for Form II because the group as it is three different needs and lessons going on, four things at the same time ----maybe different classes For their benefit .

Interviewer: We've changed the surroundings

Female Math/science subject teacher:

And the reds, and the whites and the blues, the special needs children are not at all disrupted except for ..... you have to draw his attention more and ..... yes he is very very talkative but then I can name a lot of other normal boys who talk all the time most of them are weak like ..... like ..... who is very weak you know

Interviewer: You find the weaker students are most talkative and disrupted

Female Maltese subject LSA:

Not always because like ..... who is not weak at all he is all the time communicating with James wherever you put him if you keep them apart because if you keep them close they're always communicating somewhere true This is not just ..... that means As a class but that's why I am saying they should be separated even for their sake they learn better it works better for next year

Interviewer: Do you think there is any if there are very positive effects of having statemented children in the class Is there anything positive?

Female Form 3 coordinator:

A lot of positive effects

Female English subject teacher:

I find it that when a child special needs in giving their contribution --the class is absolutely quiet they want them to achieve

Female Form 1 English/Italian subject teacher:

Now the child might have only four teachers, not many work like the other students But they appreciate it a lot and to them the

weaker students who are not stated get a bit of a courage sort of and I at least with -a little effort sort of they have more courage

Female Form 1 coordinator and Maltese subject teacher:

I see this also as negative because it means that the others consider him as being different from them if they clap for him only. No, No, he is reluctant because he is shy when it's his turn, you understand, lest he makes a fool of himself.

No, I do not classify him as all right. It was ok because they heard him, accepted him well without .... Like that it's all right.

## Focus Group 4

Interviewer: What kind of extra work does including IEN students involve?

Grade 5 Teacher:

It requires more planning and preparation – Having to learn alternative methods like Numicon. We also need to forecast any problems that might arise in school assemblies and act accordingly.

Grade 5 LSA 1:

more creative preparation  
more visuals (especially if non verbal)  
using different learning styles  
presenting modified or adapted work

Grade 5 Teacher:

Adaptations need checked by the teacher - There are times when there are more than three or four versions per lesson. We discuss different ways to adapt work

Grade 5 LSA 1:

You need to understand the student's needs and make allowances. We attempt modified seating arrangements, using cue cards, reminders etc

Grade 5 Teacher:

We face dilemmas with the classroom like for example having to ignore negative behaviour in class while it may be disruptive for the rest of the class

Grade 5 LSA 2:

We must not forget creating an awareness amongst the staff members and being an advocate for a particular student

Grade 6 LSA 2:

Preparing various levels of adaptations takes lots of time. Looking for the correct picture to go with a certain text. Sending a weekly e-mail to the parents with the weekly plan, preparation of individualised flashcards etc. It all take time.

Grade 1 LSA 2:

If need we give them extra handouts or challenging work if the child finds the work easy.

Grade 1 LSA 1:

This usually depends on the individual needs & ability. At times work need to be prepared on a differentiated level, abiding to the class topic to keep the child focused on the teacher's explanation and class discussion. We prepare activities related to the topic to keep the child busy if needed. Extra sets of visuals for individual use during explanation are needed too.

Grade 1 Teacher:

We strive to prepare activities that will include all children irrespective of their ability and this can sometimes be challenging, but through strong team work, planning in advance

and sharing of ideas we manage to prepare activities/lessons that appeal to all the class

Interviewer: OK. What effects do you think students with IEN have on the rest of the class?

Grade 1 Teacher:

Some of the children especially at first find it difficult to accept IEN students as part of the class for the reason that maybe they might disturb the class towards the beginning of school. However, this is quickly forgotten by the students around the end of the first month and start accepting them as part of the group. Most of them become best friends in fact since they feel good helping the IEN students and enjoy having them as their friends. Obviously this can be achieved only if the teacher along with the LSA's truly envisage an inclusive classroom and make sure that the LSA is not all the time next to the IEN student.

Grade 1 LSA 1:

If the child is very intelligent can help or as a class we learn from his knowledge which is positive. On the other hand children who have behaviour problems can disturb the rest of the class.

Grade 1 LSA 2:

Through peer preparation programmes students are made aware that "we are all different, we are all the same" We also explain that the adults in the class are there to help everyone, but some might need more or different help than others. Most of the time, the children learn to respect others with different needs and participate in the teaching/learning experience with the student with IEN. However we have encountered cases when the student with IEN was used to prank other kids or became a 'mascot' in the class.

Grade 6 LSA 1:

We find that sometimes talking 1 to 1 can disrupt other boys and the teacher. However it is a learning experience for everyone and boys learn to be tolerant

Grade 5 Teacher:

Students learn to respect diversity and might appreciate more their own abilities

Grade 5 LSA 1:

I believe it has a very positive effect. I believe that learning to live within a mixed ability classroom is training the students to live in a mixed ability world. Some students I have worked with have been very noisy and disruptive in class. Many would argue that this is unfair to the students who want to listen and work. I argue that through my experience I have observed that with the correct programs in place, like a P.P.P., children learn

to ignore certain behaviours and keep on working. This strategy benefits all kids in class.

Interviewer: What extent do you encourage the involvement of parents in their child's learning?

Grade 5 Team:

Considering that research shows that students tend to perform better when parents are involved in their child's education, I encourage their involvement by first keeping them informed about what is going on in the class through the children's diary, provide them with notes where necessary like for example Maths notes to explain new mathematical methods and be open to communicate with them, be it face-to-face, on the school phone, through the children's diary or through e-mail as well as through meetings.

It is 100 % - an imperative move to the child's social and academic education

Grade 6 Teacher:

I encourage reading – for example -Paired-reading at home, check diaries, revising regularly

Grade 6 LSA 2:

Keeping regular contact with the parents and discussing progress and regress and working together to help the child further. We make sure that work is done at home and also revision of tasks covered in class. Giving parents mobile number helps them keep in regular contact whenever a problem arises at home.

Grade 1 LSA1:

We encourage the parents to revise the work with their children and most important we both work with the same method so that the child is given the same learning.

Grade 1 Teacher:

I strongly believe that parental involvement in the child's learning is crucial since after finishing school the children spend most of the time with their parents so I believe it is vital that parents know what the children are doing at school and the methods that are being used to work out a concept. Children's learning does not only happen at school but also outside during their outings with their parents so it is important that parents are aware of certain methods/teachings so as to carry on building on what the education that the child is getting from school.

Grade 1 LSA 2:

We encourage parents mostly through frequent sharing of information regarding the children's progress. When new topics are learnt, we share tools that we used in class so that parents may reinforce at home. We have recently started using a website that keeps parents up to date with topics covered during a week.



## Appendix P

### Excerpt of Equal Opportunities Act (2000) Malta

for membership; and, or

- (b) a member of such registered organisation, on the grounds of the disability of such member or a disability of any of his family member by -
  - (i) denying him access to any benefit provided by the organisation or limiting his access to such benefit; or
  - (ii) depriving him of membership of the organisation; or varying the terms of such membership.

10. (1) It shall be unlawful for an employment agency to discriminate against a person on the grounds of his disability or a disability of any of his family members: Employment agencies.

- (a) by refusing to provide such person with any of its services; or
- (b) in the terms or conditions it offers to provide such person with any of its services; or
- (c) in the manner in which it provides such person with any of its services.

(2) For the purposes of this article, an employment agency shall not be deemed to discriminate against a person on the grounds of his disability, if, taking into account his training, qualifications and experience relevant to the work sought, and all other relevant factors that it finds reasonable to take into account, such person would, because of his disability, be unable to carry out the inherent requirements of the work sought.

#### TITLE 2 - EDUCATION

11. (1) Save as provided for in sub-articles (2) and (3) of this article, it shall be unlawful for an educational authority or institution to discriminate against - Education.

- (a) an applicant for admission as a student on the grounds of his disability or a disability of any of his family members -
  - (i) by refusing or failing to accept his application for such admission, or
  - (ii) in the terms or conditions on which such educational authority or institution is prepared to admit him as a student; and, or,
- (b) a student on the grounds of his disability or disability of any of his family members by -
  - (i) denying him access, or limiting his access, to any benefit provided by such educational authority or institution; or
  - (ii) expelling him from the educational institution he is attending.

(2) Where an educational authority or institution has been wholly or primarily established for students who have a particular

or a specific disability, such educational authority or institution may restrict admission to such an institution to persons who only have that particular or specific disability and refuse admission to other persons who do not have that particular or specific disability but another disability.

(3) Where the admission of a person with a disability as a student in an educational institution would necessitate the procurement of services or facilities that are not required by students who do not have a disability, the educational authority or institution concerned may refuse or fail to accept the admission as a student of such a person in that educational institution if such authority or institution proves that the admission of such person in such institution would require services or facilities the provision of which would impose unjustifiable hardship on the educational institution or authority concerned.

#### TITLE 3 - ACCESS

Access to  
premises.

12. (1) Save as provided for in sub-article (2) of this article, it shall be unlawful for any person to discriminate against another person on the grounds of the disability of such other person or a disability of any of his family members:

- (a) by refusing to allow such other person access to, or the use of any premises, or of any facilities within such premises, that the public or a article of the public is entitled or allowed to enter or use (whether on payment or not); or
- (b) in the terms or conditions on which such person is prepared to allow such other person access to, or the use of any such premises or facilities; or
- (c) in relation to the provision of means of access to such premises including any necessary alterations to such premises or facilities so as to make such access possible; or
- (d) by requiring such other person to leave such premises or to cease to use such facilities or to unjustifiably restrict in any way such use.

(2) Where -

- (a) such premises or facilities as aforesaid in this article are designed or constructed in such a way as to render them inaccessible to a person with a disability; and
- (b) any alteration of such premises or facilities would impose unjustifiable hardship on whoever is required to provide such an access,

then it shall not be unlawful for such a person to discriminate against a person with a disability by refusing him such access to or use of any premises or facilities as are referred in paragraph (a) of sub-article (1) of this article or to refuse to carry out any alterations to such premises or facilities that would otherwise render such premises or facilities accessible to a person with a disability.